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A Method for the Magic: Devising and Developing Engaged Theatre for the Very Young

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A Method for the Magic: Devising and Developing Engaged Theatre for the Very Young

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Io chi siamo.

Abstract

A Method for the Magic: Devising and Developing Engaged Theatre for the Very Young

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This reflective practitioner research study explores an artistic and education process for developing engaged and engaging Theatre for the Very Young (TVY). Through this study, the researcher asks the questions: What happens when I center an educational theory in a TVY theatre making process? And what does it look like to intentionally center the play habits, rituals, and relationships of very young people in TVY through performance choices? The researcher examines a perceived tension between artists and educators, both of whom work to center young people, in order to see what happens when theory and practices from arts and education are combined. This study examines a ten-week devising process and subsequent performances of a new TVY piece called *Magic Box*. The researcher observes and analyses preschoolers' play as inspiration for the devising and rehearsal, as well as ways that environment and adult intervention shaped youth engagement during the performance. The study concludes with recommendations for both artists and educators to attend to each other's expertise, and

encourages practitioners to include youth voices as dramaturgs for performances intended for them.

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Chapter One: Introduction, Inspiration, and Invitation

It is important that highly successful experimental theatre-makers are continuing to find working with young people artistically exciting, suggesting that young people represent an important participant public.

–Helen Nicholson (*Theatre, Education and Performance*, 205)

During my first conference session as a first-year graduate student, I found myself getting viscerally angry. The session invited international practitioners in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) to an open conversation that centered on what it means to make quality theatre for young people. My role, along with several other graduate and post graduate students attending the conference was to help facilitate a spirited dialogue, inviting both new voices and those established in their fields to participate. I, along with my colleagues tasked with facilitating, was asked to offer the perspective of a "young, emergent artist." Like most conversations amongst very different people all packed under a shared umbrella of identity (in this case "TYA enthusiasts"), the conversation started out as somewhat stilted and generic. As the session continued, however, a clear binary emerged, dividing those who identified most strongly as Theatre Educators and those who identified as Theatre Artists.

Suddenly, the emergent facilitators in the room seemed to have lost the reins of the dialogue. Tempers rose, colleagues interrupted one another, and I witnessed frequent sighs of discontent. The emotion at the table was palpable. The artists in the room argued that theatre for young people should not have to prove its value beyond the standards used to measure theatre for adults; the value of theatre, they argued, comes from

craftsmanship and a keen attention to aesthetics. To the artists in the room, "quality" meant that a performance could elicit an emotional reaction from an audience member derived from the content offered on stage. On the other side of the argument, the theatre educators in the room defended TYA's ability to elicit learning and meaning-making from young audiences. Skills and morals for young people could be—and should be—central to TYA proponents invested in quality programming for youth. They argued that theatre offers an incredible entry point for students to learn and deepen their sense of empathy, understand relationships, and learn values—so why shouldn't theatre for young people prioritize education?

My internal heat rose not from wanting to join one "side" or the other, but from my feeling that neither group was hearing the invitations offered from the "other" side. What opportunities were missed by the artists who refused to bend their values as craftspeople to gain access into the schools where all young people are mandated to spend their time? What did educators gain by arguing so adamantly that non-narrative or non-traditional theatre had nothing to offer their course curriculum? The age-old argument of "pure art" versus "educational art" reared its adamant head and left me feeling lost for words. As a person in the room who stands purposely at the center of this binary (with the hope of disrupting it altogether), identifying as both an educator and a theatre maker, I wanted to wave my arms wildly. It felt as if no one in the room wanted to explore the possibility that "art for arts' sake" might be educational in and of itself.

I recognized in that moment that I am interested to make Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) that lives comfortably at the center of this timeworn tension between

art and education. The conversation described above left me wondering who is at the center of our dialogues about quality, *really*. What do young people want to see? Where might the expertise of educators and the expertise of artists intersect in this conversation around quality TYA? What does engaging TYA look like, and how is that engagement valued by the many key stakeholders in this field? With this study, I seek to disrupt this tension and see what might appear when arts practice and an educational framework are placed in response to one another in a theatre making process aimed specifically at young people.

My expertise as a preschool teacher in a *Reggio* school for 2 years, coupled with my experience in making and performing theatre for the very young, led me to wonder what would happen when I aimed to center the instincts and play processes of young people during the devising and play-making process. As an educator and an artist, I experienced the desire to center very young people in an explicitly mindful way. This tension and desire to bridge the space between my two identities led me to a set of core research questions for this thesis. In this reflective practitioner research study, I explore: **What happens when I center an educational theory in a TVY theatre making process?** The process of researching this question led me to design and experiment with a method for devising new work, inspired by *Reggio Emilia,* an educational framework built upon inquiry based teaching and learning. In order to build the performance design inspired by Reggio, I decided to carefully observe preschool aged children during their free play time and to use these observations to generate theatrical material with a team of theatre artists. Through this process, my research then led me to ask: **What does it look**

like to intentionally center the play habits, rituals, and relationships of very young people in TVY through performance choices?

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Before I knew that large gatherings of people came together from all over the world with the express goal of talking about, making, selling and buying theatre especially for young audiences, I worked as a preschool teacher in Chicago's Lincoln Park neighborhood. The preschool curriculum was rooted in the *Reggio Emilia* philosophy. Our curriculum was project based and arts integrated, and centered educational standards in Social Emotional Learning (SEL). I worked to provide students with space, provocations, and materials to grapple with ideas that interested them most. Ultimately, the focus of my curriculum privileged the *learning process* over *learning outcomes*—something I valued in my personal artistic process as well.

Teaching preschool as a *Reggio* instructor also led me to think about the ways that engaging with students through arts integrated, social emotional learning or SEL-forward lesson planning, and giving attention to aesthetics, was all part of my artistic practice. I set up my classroom space with open-ended materials for the students to make art projects, engage in improvised dramatic play, and follow their curious impulses. I frequently depended on my theatre training: utilizing my improvisation skills and relying on my ability to listen and respond to the impulses of students within a given set of circumstances. My daily lessons were based on what the children played with during open play. After only a few years in the classroom, I left Chicago for graduate school: hungry to codify a system to explain what made my experience of teaching preschool in a

constructivist, *Reggio* classroom feel so deeply rooted in an artistic—specifically theatre—foundation.

In my first semester of graduate school, I was introduced to a method for making theatre performance intentionally for very young audiences (TVY). Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) is situated under the TYA performance umbrella but with an emphasis on a small age range, typically 3-5 years, with a wide developmental spectrum. While TYA is often recognized for its entertainment and educational value as part of professional theatre spaces, TVY is a much newer and less defined form of theatre that often considers the needs of both caretakers and their very young people. The class gave me the opportunity to collaboratively devise an original performance specifically intended for an audience of 2-5 years old, i.e. "very young" audience members. The artistic platform we used in the class to devise our original work, called the PaperBoats, is a system for play building codified by a South Australian theatre maker named Dave Brown. Devising theatre with the PaperBoats platform offered me an approach to performance making that felt like the ways I had previously structured my preschool classroom. Within my graduate class that participated in the PaperBoats process, I was given a limited but specific set of "ingredients" to apply to my theatrical impulses within a group rehearsal and devising process. As artists in the collaborative devising process, our creative impulses turned into short theatrical moments, or modules, and those modules were strung together by our director to form an emergent narrative. Over the course of the semester, the whimsy and delight of our playing turned into a rigorous and intentional structure in which we applied logic onto our creative impulses to shape and share a

cohesive story. The culminating performance of our class was a non-verbal, modular, physical performance that involved moments of audience participation, direct address to the audience, live music and Foley work, and the use of nontraditional props, such as receipt roll paper and wooden balls.

The PaperBoats theatre making process served my personal sense of play, but I left my experience of devising TVY with many questions. I wondered what the PaperBoats devising process would look like if, in addition to centering *my* artistic impulses, the devising process centered the experiences, relationships, rituals and practices of the same young people for whom I was making this theatre. *My* artistic inquiries and impulses were on showcase in the PaperBoats work, but I wanted to be in dialogue even earlier with the aesthetics and interests of very young people. For this thesis project, I experimented with a system for devising that would align with my interest and experience in facilitating a *Reggio* curriculum with my desire to center young people in my making process. More specifically, I aimed to move through a creative process that would center young people at all points of the art making process.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

For this study, I observed a group of preschool students during their free play time at a local preschool and then used those observations to devise an original performance piece for very young audiences. The resulting play, *Magic Box,* was developed in partnership with the PaperBoats platform, and was devised by an artistic team of two actors, a musician, and myself. *Magic Box is* a 40-minute non-verbal, physical theatre

piece that explores the relationship and rituals of two characters who come into conflict and make discoveries about how to play with one another. My fieldwork site for this study was a preschool in Austin, Texas. I chose the site because the school uses a play-based, constructivist learning philosophy with its students. I became acquainted with a preschool in Austin[1] whose teaching philosophy and outdoor play space were a perfect fit for my inquiry. Though the school wasn't specifically a *Reggio Emilia* school, the teachers and administrators used a play-based model of teaching and learning with the students. I observed the preschoolers at play, and simultaneously directed and collaboratively devised the performance piece over a two-month period. We then rehearsed and performed the show a month later. Importantly, early in the observation and rehearsal process, though my intention was to involve the preschoolers as dramaturgs (meaning, I intended to perform for and elicit feedback from the preschoolers), I ultimately chose to keep the rehearsal process with the adult artists separate from my observation time at the preschool. This decision came in part because of time constraints both with my artistic team and because of scheduling conflicts at the preschool, and in part because I didn't develop strong relationships with the teaching staff at the Austin Preschool. I address this absence of young people, and the consequences of this decision for this devising process more thoroughly in my conclusion.

I visited the school for an hour once a week for a total of 10 consecutive weeks. My observations took place during recess time for the 3 and 4-year-old class every

[1] For the sake of participant anonymity with my partner preschool, I use the pseudonym, "Austin Preschool" throughout the document.

Thursday for an hour. I captured both video and audio documentation of these sessions. I watched the students engage with one another during their entirely student-led or "free play" time. Throughout my observations, I interacted with the children, which meant that over the course of the observation period I became an active participant in the children's playing.

For the devising process of this project, I recruited two performers and a musician to work with me over the course of 3 months to generate material for a 45-minute performance which we shared with the Austin Preschool families and two public audiences at the University of Texas at Austin. Our rehearsals ranged from 2-4 hours each week. I used several devising methods with the artistic team to generate short improvised non-verbal modules. These methods included offering questions, or "provocations" intended to spark performance ideas in the actors. The provocations I designed were based on the observational material from the Austin Preschool footage. We started each rehearsal by watching key moments from video at the preschool, previously viewed and selected by me. Our subsequent group dialogue about the preschool footage generated a) familiarity with (and a fondness for) the students we were generating the work for; b) the development of a 'gestural vocabulary' and character relationships directly inspired by our observations of the preschoolers, which we were then able to integrate into the performance material.

A month before the final performances, I invited small groups of adult volunteer observers from the University of Texas at Austin to come into the rehearsal space and watch a run-through of the performance in workshop. These invited dress rehearsals

happened twice in the process, and each group was comprised of different adult audience participants. During these performance workshops, I asked the adult observers to offer me feedback about moments in the performance that they enjoyed, moments in the show that surprised them, and moments in the show that they wondered or had questions about. I incorporated these verbal notes into the subsequent rehearsals with the ensemble.

Our first performance of *Magic Box* took place on November 15th, 2018 at the Austin Preschool on the school's outdoor playground. The subsequent two performances took place on November 18th, 2018 at The University of Texas at Austin in an indoor studio space. A lighting designer for *Magic Box* observed the Austin Preschool performance and then, over the course of two days, including a technical day in the studio space that I contributed to, developed an original lighting design for the two shows at UT.

In total, we performed *Magic Box* three times. The first performance was presented at the Austin Preschool for students, teachers, and caregivers of the school with whom we had worked during the previous 10 weeks. This performance took place on the school's outdoor playground. The subsequent two performances of *Magic Box* took place the following weekend at the University of Texas at Austin. These performances took place inside of a studio performance space, and unlike the outdoor performance at the preschool, included a lighting design. The Austin Preschool performance had an audience of about fifteen to twenty young people and twenty to thirty adults. The university performances contained audiences of 4 to 10 young people and 15 to 30 adults.

Following each of the performances, I invited the audiences to complete a written survey, which I designed to collect data regarding adult caregivers' observations of their

young audience member during the performance. In addition to the survey tool used by the adult audience participants, I invited 3 to 5 adult observers who were graduate colleagues of mine to document their observations of individual young audience members throughout the performance using an observation tool I developed. I filmed all three of the performances.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

As an artist-educator, I humbly step into the lineage of artists, scholars, and pedagogues who have worked to illuminate a widely recognized tension between artistry and education through their work with youth-focused dramaturgy and youth-centered theatre making. In her dissertation, Kristin Leahey defines a "youth respondent method[2]" of including young people as part of an artistic making process. Leahey defines the method as, "a process by which artists and/or producers involve participants through planned theatre activities or discussions with the objective of answering specific questions about the development of the work and collect feedback to improve the text or further the production" (5). With this study, I seek to build connective tissue between these constructs and imagine an alternative to this limiting binary. As an artist-educator, I posit that one way to ease this tension is to identify and work toward *authentic* and *quality* forms of engagement between young people and a performance piece. Here, I define authentic engagement as that which centers the age appropriate and student

[2] While Leahey's method for working with and developing creatively with young people focuses primarily on learners starting at age 11, the invitation to collaborate with youth in order to develop work that resonates specifically with their interests is not unusual to the field of TYA and TVY makers for a younger age range.

directed experiences of preschool audience members. Although quality is a notoriously slippery term to define, Project Zero's (Harvard Education's research department) 2009 comprehensive meta-analysis concerning excellence in arts education offers a detailed survey of findings regarding quality arts practices specifically in learning environments. The authors write, "…continuous reflection and discussion about what constitutes quality and how to achieve it is not only a catalyst *for* quality but also a sign *of* quality" (iv). In this regard, my thesis research is a part of a larger set of investigations that seek to develop quality art for young learners, and to investigate the meaning and function of quality in student-centered theatre and performance. Project Zero's study suggests that, "arts educators described engagement as both a necessary condition for and a strong indicator of a high-quality arts learning experience" (30). In an effort to find the blurred space between art making and educational practices in TVY making, I focus on quality forms of engagement as one necessary piece of bridging the arts/education divide.

As I intentionally weave art making with an educational framework, I look to Loris Malaguzzi's *Reggio Emilia* philosophy for early childhood learning to provide this study with its educational underpinnings. My inquiry in developing TVY that specifically centers a constructivist educational framework is similar to many theatre makers in the field whose unconventional processes push the boundaries of both form and function in theatre engagement practices. Kerfuffle, a TVY theatre company based in Omaha, Nebraska develops new theater and dance performance for young people inspired by the physical movement and emergent performance themes taken from residencies with young

people[3]. According to Kerfuffle's website, "teaching artists … explore and play with children using improvisation, storytelling, movement and visual art to explore a central topic while a playwright observes and documents the experiences paying particular attention to what excites and moves the children" (Laverty, "*About Kerfuffle"*). Similarly, New York based TYA company, Trusty Sidekick generates new work in a development process that includes youth expertise and vision. In a video describing Trusty Sidekick's process for developing new work including the dramaturgical involvement of young people, artistic director Drew Peterson explains, "one of our goals at Trusty Sidekick is to create high quality inventive theatre performed by professional artists, but we wanted to make sure [we were] also making work that really excites and connects with our young audience" (Trusty Sidekick, "The Quest"). Co-founder and former artistic director Jonathan Shmidt Chapman continues, "our process begins with a question that sparks the imaginations of both the artists and the kids" (Trusty Sidekick, "The Quest"). In Australia, the innovative and visually arresting TVY and TYA performances at Polyglot theatre often use a similar devising process for creating work alongside and in response to young audiences' dramaturgical contributions. In their website description, Polyglot's artistic director Sue Giles explains that method for making involves workshops and "deliberate consultation" with school communities to "[invite] children's engagement in originating and testing ideas through [an] observation of behavior and play" (Giles, "Kids' Collaborations").

[3] Kerfuffle's production of *wonderwantder*, designed and performed in collaboration with founding member Amanda Pintore, is an exploration of devised dance performance for the very young. Pintore developed movement and choreography for the performance by mirroring very young dancers' "movement behaviors … in a research setting" (IPAY, 56).

In my own project design, I draw inspiration from the vastly innovative field of TVY artists currently producing new work both nationally and globally. Several theatre companies and designers rigorously invite an ensemble of professional theatre makers to develop new performances for very young audiences. The Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Georgia, Arts on the Horizon in Alexandria, Virginia, and Spellbound Theatre in Brooklyn, New York each take a vested interest in producing, developing, and sharing unique, intimate, and engaging performances that cater to the interests and aesthetic desires of their target audiences: very young people and their caretakers. Where my project design and interest in catering to the aesthetic interests and inquiries of young people is by no means unique, my area of specific inquiry in this research project led me to study the ways in which observations of young people during their free playing could be used in a devising process with theater makers. While the above-mentioned companies share devised work with young people throughout their development process, I wanted to see what could happen if I brought the gesture of children's play directly into the devising process.

Aesthetics in Theatre for the Very Young

TVY is just beginning to find its place within the canon of Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA). An aspect of TVY's form that interests me is investigating the ways in which aesthetics are connected to a perception of quality theatre practices. According to theatre scholar Manon van de Water, TVY aesthetics and education are intertwined, particularly regarding what constitutes age appropriate theatre. Van de Water writes, "the

constructed narrative of theatre for young audiences in the US is derived from concepts and forms that pertained to both social orders and aesthetic forms" (1-3). She continues, "the notion of 'appropriateness' of theatre for and by children created new aesthetic criteria that did not necessarily reflect the aesthetic development (in formal styles, conventions, or thematics) of its adult counterpart" (103). Presumably van de Water refers to TYA in opposition to adult theatre. As innovative artists and theatre makers have continued to push the aesthetic value of performance generated specifically for very young audiences, however, the definition of TYA continues to evolve. Van de Water takes note of the 1990 re-definition of TYA asserted by the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) which states:

> Theatre for young audiences is an aesthetic-driven, live performance which includes elements relevant to the child. Although Theatre for Young Audiences can amaze, challenge, inform, and empower young people by providing access to the humanizing effect of theatre, the priority is on the creation of a work of art.
> (AATE March 1990)

The tension between art and education exists even within this definition, as AATE's definition of TYA prioritizes *artistic value* over *educational value*. However, Theatre for the Very Young (TVY) needs its own definition within the larger umbrella of TYA.

Researcher Susan Young of the University of Exeter in the UK defines Theatre for the Very Young (also called Theatre for Early Years) as a "participatory theatre piece for carers and their under-two-year-olds" (13). Young concludes that the formulation of theatre for very young children, "requires specific and additional sets of skills from writer, designer and composer and from the participating actors" (13). TVY scholar and author of "'Seen and Not Heard': participation as tyranny in Theatre for Early Years,"

Ben Fletcher-Watson refers to this theatre form as "TEY" or Theatre for the Early Years. Fletcher-Watson defines Theatre for Early Years as including audience members up to age 5 (25). For the purposes of this document, I use the term TVY because it is widely recognized in both the making and marketing practices of professional theatres engaging with making theatre for a very young audience population, particularly in the US. Fletcher-Watson describes the theatricality of TVY performances as, "often wordless and without explicit narrative, they seem to challenge normative modes of performance for children" (14). In other words, TVY is recognized for its abstract, often immersive content which is intended to suit the interests and age appropriate experiences of very young people. Fletcher-Watson centers the idea that very young audiences experience theatrical moments by co-creating moments of interaction or "play" with TVY performers.

The PaperBoats platform exists in alignment with this idea of co-constructed play which challenges the notion of normative modes of performance, i.e. non-participatory, narrative performance. Theatre artist and self-identified, "thinker and tinkerer," Dave Brown has created a platform called the PaperBoats which outlines his principles for developing unique performance experiences for very young audiences. The platform offers collaborative groups of artists an opportunity to devise new theatre using performance-making principles which include the following: an animating framework, limiting the artistic palette, whimsy and logic, slow brewing, collaboration and co-creation, modularity, and artistry (Brown, "Principles"). Performances within PaperBoats

projects often include non-verbal, movement based and image heavy theatrical gestures, including loosely structured narrative seen through open-ended imagery.

Brown's principals for devising TVY invite makers to explore an aesthetic vocabulary for making theatre. However, within the process of creating or principles for devising, young people are not necessarily centered throughout the devising process. In an interview with Brown regarding how the PaperBoats model draws inspiration from a *Reggio* educational framework, he offered,

> I started to look at what *Reggio* was doing in terms of its philosophy and practice in aligning that with the way we were making theatre and the way we were aspiring to reconnect with our inner child … Knowing that the difference was that we as adults had the experience and capacity to reflect on our play, our content generation, and then to reflect and maneuver it into a meaning-making proposition.
>
> (Brown, Personal Interview)

Through the PaperBoats approach to devising, performers are invited to generate playful, creative performance *inspired* by the open, often whimsical, play habits of young people. However, as said above, I am curious about how Brown's performance making principles, when applied to a body of material generated by young people, might not only expand the quality of artistic content for the young audience population, but also make space for the young people themselves to be at the center of the generative work. I went into this study with the belief that centering young people and their play behaviors within the generative work with theatre artists (meaning that theatre makers are rigorously listening to and watching very young people during their uninhibited play and then using

those observations to inspire theatrical performance), would mean prioritizing young people themselves.

I argue that Brown's devising platform offers artists a useful framework to play within, and situates TVY in alignment with AATE's definition of TYA, prioritizing aesthetics over education. In *Theatre, Education and Performance*, Helen Nicholson discusses important areas of overlap in drama/theatre for young audiences between aesthetics and education, particularly regarding newer, more experimental work. Nicholson writes, "new social circumstances bring new forms of theatrical expression and, in this respect, theatre-makers who work in twenty-first century theatre education are following their predecessors by bringing together cutting edge contemporary theatre and new educational ideas" (86). She later makes the distinction between *theatre education* and *theatre for young audiences* writing,

> Theatre for young audiences may be less instrumentally educational than some approaches to theatre education, but my decision to include it in this book is built on the view that all imaginative and challenging theatre extends children's cultural education, and the experience of seeing the work of professional theatre-makers contributes to their artistic development. (87)

In many ways, this thesis project aims to answer Nicholson's invitation to 'overlap practices' and to extend the dialogue between quality aesthetic content and constructivist education methodologies in our work for young people.

Education of Preschoolers

In an effort to work at the intersection of artistry and education, I draw on early childhood educational philosophies that center project based learning, and play-based

curriculum, specifically *Reggio Emilia.* The *Reggio Emilia* approach is rooted in educational philosophies of Piaget, Gardner and Vygotsky, and relies on inquiry and student centered meaning-making. Influenced by Vygotsky's concept of the *zone of proximal development,* Malaguzzi explains, "we seek a situation in which the child is about to see what the adult already sees. The gap is small between what each one sees, the task of closing it appears feasible, and the child's skills and disposition create an expectation and readiness to make the jump" (84). Malaguzzi explores how the philosophy supports creativity, which he describes as *not* sacred, and iterative or "circular" meaning-making. "Creativity," he explains, "should not be considered a separate mental faculty but a characteristic of our way of thinking, knowing, and making choices" (75). In other words, central to the *Reggio* philosophy is the notion that the interests and inquiries of young people can and should be at the center of their learning.

In this research document, I consciously weave educational language, play-based philosophies, and inquiries located in educational theatre with dialogue concerning quality practices in the development of TVY. *Reggio Emilia* scholar, Loris Malaguzzi posits, "once children are helped to perceive themselves as authors or inventors, once they are helped to discover the pleasure of inquiry, their motivation and interest explode" (Edwards et al. 67). It is my aim to cultivate theatre in early childhood settings that may invite young people to investigate their interests. The *Reggio* philosophy resonates with my interests in making engaged theatre for young audiences in two ways: one, that *process* is valued over product, and two, that meaning-making (or engagement) is unique to the individual audience member.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

With this project, I hope to offer the field a process for centering young people in theatre for the very young work and situating TVY at the intersection of arts and education. The *Reggio* philosophy for early learning asks educators to make intentional and open-ended learning environments for young people to make meaning of their surroundings by investigating, drawing conclusions, and demonstrating understanding through multiple, often non-verbal methods. In this regard, *Reggio* educators intentionally center the experiences of young people to create quality, student-driven learning. Through this TVY devising process and the proceeding research, I aim to blend open ended education practices (inspired specifically by *Reggio* philosophy) with open ended theatre making techniques (inspired by my work with PaperBoats) in order to authentically center very young audiences in the theatre created for them.

This study seeks to bridge the gap in TVY that puts *educational value* and *artistic value* at opposing sides of the field, and to move toward a productive dialogue and blending of theories that will center young audiences in our work. This research document aims at codifying a method for building intentional, aesthetically valuable and educationally relevant TVY. I keep in mind the lineage of TVY performance makers currently developing new and unique theatrical experiences for young audiences both nationally and internationally; Loris Malaguzzi's invitation to build educational structures for young people to construct their own meaning; van de Water and Fletcher-Watson's call to develop quality, aesthetically driven theatre; and Nicholson's invitation for TVY to exist as a bridge between theatre education practices.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, I used a Reflective Practitioner Research methodology to document the development process of a new play for very young audiences, specifically preschoolers within an emergent curriculum and play-based educational setting. Philip Taylor describes Reflective Practitioner Research as that which honors the "intuitive and emergent processes that inform artistic meaning-making" (29). To document and explore my own artistic meaning-making through the process of creating *Magic Box*, I used several methods of documenting my observations: recorded conversations between myself and the artistic collaboration team and a reflective practitioner journal where I recorded my thoughts throughout the process.

One of my central research questions, as stated above, was: **What does it look like to intentionally center the play habits, rituals, and relationships of very young people in TVY through performance choices?** To better understand this question, I wanted to specifically look at preschoolers' free time engagement, and thus I captured and then reviewed video and audio recordings of my Austin Preschool observations. From these content sources, I wrote down key observations and reflections about aesthetics and education. Specifically, I looked for moments that I found aesthetically pleasing to watch and moments in which the preschoolers showed their ways of playing and relating to each other physically. These documented moments included a range of interactions between the students including: moments of conflict, moments in which students invited other students to play (both verbally and non-verbally), moments of repetition and following, moments of deviating from games and independent thinking. I

paid attention to physical gestures that I observed in multiple students, facial expressions, and body language, looking for moments that I suspected would invite the adult performers to make interesting artistic choices during the devising and rehearsal process.

Furthermore, I focused specifically on data generated from the rehearsal process and the three performances, as well as post performance interviews. I used a coding process to analyze the transcripts of interviews with the performers and selected teachers at the Austin Preschool, and the video documentation of the performances, paying specific attention to the ways young people were centered throughout both the process of producing performance material, and through the ways young people engaged with the performance itself. My analysis looked at emergent themes that center on preschool students' interaction with each other (moments of engagement), the relationships developed by the performers and the young audience members during the performance, and the ways in which our aesthetic choices informed the experience of both the young audience members, the adult audience members, and the performers themselves.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In this introduction, I name myself as an artist-educator with the intention of positioning young people at the center of a TVY making and performance process. I offer my experience with the tension between arts and education in theatre for young audiences and position my study as an attempt at a practice that both investigates and troubles that same tension. I provide an overview of my research methods and explain the ways in which I used a reflective practitioner research methodology to document the development

of *Magic Box*, an original TVY performance piece, including the ways that arts and education were at play in my process. I share how I analyzed my data and drew conclusions about better integrating arts and education in TVY.

In Chapter 2, I describe and analyze the process of making *Magic Box* in partnership with the Austin Preschool learners. This chapter is broken into two parts. In Part 1, I describe the process of observing preschoolers in an Austin Preschool during their free play time, outlining the emergent relationships that formed throughout the observation process between myself (the researcher) and the students. I analyze my learning as a facilitator and share findings on how "playful rebellion" in preschool playing affected my relationship to the TVY development process. In Part 2 of this chapter, I describe how my artistic team and I integrated the preschoolers' play into a rehearsal process for an original TVY performance called *Magic Box*. I examine data from our rehearsal and observation process and analyze what I saw in the relationship building between myself, the adult artists, and the preschool aged children. I then explore the ways in which centering young people's play contributes to an aesthetically intentional theatre making process. I conclude with reflections on my process of moving away from mimicking preschool play, and offer an argument for building performance based on inspiration of preschool play instead.

In Chapter 3, I describe and analyze the three performances of *Magic Box*, focusing specifically on the ways in which the three audiences engaged with the piece. I explore the rules of the two performance spaces, the ways in which the young audiences engaged with the performances, and the ways in which the adult audiences engaged with

their young people. I found that underlying expectations of place and space informed both the forms of engagement by young people and the interactions (and sometimes *interventions*) of adult audiences. I also found that the ways young audiences engaged with the performance piece relate to the idea of rebellious play and rebellious engagement that I write about in chapter 2. I conclude with an invitation to both artists and educators to find value from and partnership with one another, as well as to center young people by creating intentional art specifically *for them*.

In Chapter 4, I reflect on my learning as an artist, educator, and researcher in terms of what it means to center the experiences and interests of young people through the creation of an original performance piece. I share my research challenges and provide a framework for a revised TVY making process inspired by my learning. I make recommendations for TVY practitioners about how preschool partnerships might help bridge the gap between aesthetics and education in TVY. Finally, I acknowledge the places where this tension did not move, reflecting on larger questions and systems surrounding the relationship between arts and education in theatre for young audiences.

Chapter Two: Threading Preschool Observation into Performance Devising

...to truly understand children's talking, we should treat it as discourse, an intelligent pattern of thoughts that is worthy of study. We do this by asking, 'What are the reasons the child might have for making their claims?'

–George Foreman and Brenda Fyfe, (*The Hundred Languages of Children*, 247)

In this chapter I share a detailed description and analysis of the development process that I used to devise and rehearse the original TVY piece, *Magic Box.* In part 1, I describe the methods I used to observe a class of 3 and 4 year olds at an art based preschool in South Austin, and explore the surprising relationships I made with the students throughout my 10-week observation residency. I then explore how the relationships that emerged from this observation process became the central inspiration as I made the TVY performance piece, *Magic Box*. In part 2, I describe the devising and rehearsal process of working with adult artists to generate new performance material. I share the discoveries, patterns, and tensions that arose from using the video documented observation material from the preschool. I then analyze the devising process and share my discoveries about making TVY in a way that centers the rituals, relationships, and interests of young people. In this analysis, I investigate the value of what I call rebellious play within a devising process for TVY. I then share discoveries that my artistic ensemble and I made as we took inspiration from preschoolers' play, rather than mimicking or directly reinterpreting moments of play. Finally, I conclude the chapter

with the ways in which my investigation of this devising process relates to the tensions between art and education practices in a TVY setting.

My findings in this chapter connect specifically to my research question: **What does it look like to intentionally center the play habits, rituals, and relationships of very young people in TVY through performance choices?** To study this question, I looked at both the process of making a new TVY performance using observations from the preschool free play time, the findings of which I share in this chapter. Chapter three is the second part of my inquiry into this question, and I explore how the choices we made in the devising and observation process translated to the performance for young people. I began this devising process with two practical questions: *how do young people interact with each other during their free play?* And, *how might I translate my observations of young people's play into theatrical performance?* I wondered what would happen if I made a piece of theatre that was inspired by the ways that young people play with each other, rather than making theatre that told young people the ways adults *wanted* them to play.

To better understand how adult theatre makers can intentionally center the interests of a preschool community in a devising process, I collected data from a variety of sources throughout my observation and rehearsal process. These data sources include weekly personal reflections about my time with the preschoolers as well as my rehearsal time with Kaci, Laura and Jada; recorded video from the Austin Preschool observation days, and recorded audio interviews between myself, my artistic collaborators, and the education staff at the preschool.

PLAYFUL REBELLION: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN RESEARCHER & PRESCHOOLERS

My process for developing the content for the TVY piece involved two simultaneous generative areas. Over the course of 14 weeks, I recorded weekly observations of a class of three and four-year-olds at the Austin Preschool to capture images and video of the students in moments of authentic play. I defined "authentic moments between peers" as play that was neither directly instigated nor interrupted by the presence of adults. The content I captured through the video recorded preschool observations then informed our rehearsal process with the adult artistic ensemble (which I talk about in more detail in the next section of this chapter). Each week, I looked for physical gestures (i.e. facial expressions, movement patterns, stillness and frenetic movement) and themes in the children's play (i.e. child initiated conversations between peers, conversation content, forms of conflict and resolution, etc.) that fit the devised story we were developing in rehearsal.

My intention at the beginning of this process was to remain neutral or as close to anonymous as possible to the preschoolers while I collected the data. However, I began to develop a sense of kinship and trust with the students. Over time, many young students who recognized me each week invited me to play with them and wanted to show me or tell about me what they were doing. I noticed similarities in the ways that different children showed interest in interacting with me and I started to look for patterns in their interactions with me. For example, if one child recognized me at the edge of the sandbox, they might ask me if I wanted to see how fast they could run. This often set off a chain reaction and other students would join in the "competition," showing me how they fast

they could run too. I tried to neither encourage nor discourage their behavior, but rather to remain open to the children's interest in my attention. I defined these moments of interaction between myself and the children as moments of invitation—a term that became useful in the rehearsal and devising process. However, despite these delightful interactions and invitations, I often left my observations at the preschool doubting that my interactions had anything to offer theatre making.

As I wondered about the effectiveness of my methods for collecting useable theatre artifacts at the preschool, I also worried that I was not being a collaborative educator. The Austin Preschool teachers and I initially agreed that I would lead circle time activities with the students or bring in drama games to generate material with the students. As I moved into the actual observations however, I made the decision to pare down my plans to facilitate activities with the students, and instead I leaned into just observing the students during their recess time. I noticed some confusion from the teachers at the Austin Preschool when I tried to explain that I was not there to *teach* the children or to make theatre *with* the children, but merely wanted to learn from the students by watching them play. It was important to me too that I not take advantage of the preschoolers who were not cognitively aware that I was videotaping their play and bringing that content into another space to build a performance with adults. Retrospectively, I wonder how making my observations more transparent to the young people might affect the results of a devising process.

After a few visits to the preschool, many of the students continued their free play without noticing me, and only paid attention to me if I spoke directly to them—although

even my questions sometimes yielded blank stares or shy responses. I did however develop a strong rapport with one preschooler who I call 'Finn' (pseudonym). Finn learned my name quickly and came up to me as soon as I walked onto the playground each week. He often asked me to watch him complete various competitive physical tasks like running fast or throwing objects. I looked forward to checking in with Finn and I also found myself wanting to play with him—actually *play*. His small side smile and twinkly eyes made me feel mischievous and conspiratorial. Finn's deviance, or *playful rebellion*, was compelling to me to both participate in, and to watch others enact. Acts of playful rebellion between young people and adults took the form of invitations to participate in a game or, often, watch a physical behavior (e.g. "Come do X with me!" or "watch me do Y!") Retrospectively, I found that what attracted me to such moments between the young people was less that the students were intentionally "acting out" or behaving rebelliously, but that their behavior could be read as disruptive or rebellious by an adult, specifically someone placed in the role of policing and disciplining certain behaviors. As an outsider-observer, I gave myself permission to step back from any role that might be labeled as disciplinarian.

The following is an excerpt of an interaction with Finn that encapsulates an experience of observing a moment of *playful rebellion* which I recorded in my reflective practitioner notes. I first transcribed the audio recording from the visit and then wrote out my thoughts and reflections as I listened to myself interact with Finn.

Transcribed Dialogue	***My Inner Thoughts***
FINN: Guess how far I can throw one.	*Finn is referring to the small acorn in his hand.*
LINA: Let's find out.	*I am, at this point, feeling self-aware of other teachers' eyes on my interaction with Finn, however, I'm also interested in seeing where this game will go.*
FINN: Point to where you think I can throw one.	*Finn is challenging me here; making a game and instigating competition. I also am aware he is testing my boundaries. I suspect that he wonders if or when I will discipline him.*
LINA: I think you can probably throw one all the way to the wall there. What do you think?	*Here, I am attempting to both figuratively and literally redirect this new game to a space where there are no people standing. Finn's body is pointed toward a group of people and I anticipate that he wants me to ask him to throw the acorn at the people.*
FINN: Further.	*Finn is challenging me. This is a fun game for him, and honestly, I'm delighted too.*
LINA: Further?!	*I'm experiencing delight in this interaction. I feel like Finn has turned me into his accomplice. Truthfully, I DO want to see how far Finn's going to throw this acorn but I am also very sure that he's going to aim it at another person, which, again, I want to avoid.*
FINN: Like—all the way across the sandbox.	*This is a preposterously long distance for Finn, a 4-year-old, to throw an acorn. We are both committing to this dangerous game through imaginary circumstances, seeing who will be the first to stop the game or take a leap and be naughty.*
LINA: From here?! That is super far. FINN: Watch.	*Before I can stop him, Finn throws the acorn directly at a group of preschoolers. He doesn't hit anyone but several people turn and look our direction. I look immediately toward*

	the teachers to see if we've been caught. The last thing I want to do is get Finn in trouble, but the second to last thing I want to do is get in trouble myself.
LINA: Do you see—ok. Whoa! That was super far! FINN: What?! It's gone! LINA: [*laughing*] Should we see if we can find it? FINN: Yeah. We just lost one.	

(Chambers, Austin Preschool Audio Transcription)

Through my growing familiarity with Finn, I started to notice the ways other preschoolers playfully rebelled in their interactions with one another. To center the experience and the authentic play habits of the children—rather than the play habits adults expected the young people to engage in—I wondered if and how these observed moments of *playful rebellion* could be useful to both devise from (with the adult actors) and perform for a young audience.

An element of devising TVY as an adult and intending to center the experiences and interests of young audiences is acknowledging that I am not a preschooler. The obvious is worth pointing out: young people do not read me as a *peer*, but as a person who has the potential and the power to start and stop elements of their behavior. In the above interaction, Finn challenged me on my role as a disciplinarian, playfully rebelling against the expectation that he should "behave" and I should "discipline." By sharing interactions like the acorn moment with the adult artists back in the rehearsal room, I

could clearly point to specific forms of rebellious play, particularly between young people and adults.

However, my excitement in sharing this observation with team of adult artists was laced with some anxiety. In rehearsal, the artistic ensemble and I wanted to create theatre inspired by rebellious moments of play. As the narrative in the rehearsal room began to take shape, I felt both excitement and tension in developing a work that I believed represented some of the rebellious behavior of young people. I worked with the adult ensemble to incorporate some of the rebellious play we observed in the preschool playing into our work (a process which I explain in detail in the next section). However, even from the beginning I grappled with how the addition of rebellion between two character would read to an adult audience, and even received both covert and overt pushback from my (adult) outside observers. The following is excerpted from my reflective practitioner journal; note that in our devising process, two characters in the play get into an escalating push argument with one another, and one character ends up pushing the other outside of their nest. I write:

> […] I've seen moments like this [pushing behavior] frequently in the [Austin preschool] observation videos: two young people playing and shoving each other and then playing again. There are very rarely tears. There is very rarely yelling or emotional escalation. The physicality of the moment, when caught by a teacher, is often reprimanded, but when left unchecked dissolves into other play. Sometimes the shoving leads to harder, rough housing, but sometimes it pivots into a new movement or part of the playing. We wanted this moment in *magic Box* to happen when the two characters are too close to each other in the nest and explore the constraints of their world. The shoving escalates and eventually one of the characters is pushed out of the nest.
>
> (Chambers, Reflective Journal, 22 Oct 2018)

I felt a growing tension between the two sides of this arts/education binary I was trying to blend in this process. In this regard, I began to lean into my own rebellion against expectations or assumptions about the ideal function of TVY—the perception that TVY should have an educational, or the equivalent to a moralistic foundation. In my journal, I reflected on a conversation I had with an Austin Preschool teacher during one of my observations:

> […] the thing that's sticking most with me is that [the teacher] wondered what, if any, were the take-away lessons I wanted to audience to leave this piece with. This question was something a preschool teacher at [Austin Preschool] also asked me about a week ago during one of the observations. She wondered if I might write up a short blurb about what kind of take-aways the students would get from watching [*Magic Box*]. I felt surprised by the question in the moment and didn't quite know how to answer so I sort of stumbled through an answer about the piece having to do with modeling behavior. She nodded vigorously and said, 'oh, good good, that's what I was thinking." I don't even fully know what that meant.
>
> (Chambers, Reflective Journal, 22 Oct 2019)

I felt pulled between a personal sense of rebellion, and a desire to please the adult stakeholders in my collaboration with the Austin Preschool. I felt as if I were leaning away from what I felt might please the teachers at the preschool (prioritizing educational take-aways) and instead leaned into what I felt was enjoyable, funny, and surprising to watch. *If,* during their free time, young people were engaging with one another in playful, sometimes rough or deviant ways, and *if* I was really centering the young people's ways of playing through performance, then it felt important that I should honor what I was seeing in the observations by reflecting their play in the performance content. This tension continues to exist in my artistic learning as I tangle with my identity and my

expectations for myself within the interrelated roles of *artist* and an *educator* in a TVY making process.

INSPIRATION WITHOUT MIMICKING: PLAYMAKING WITH ADULT THEATRE MAKERS

Between September and November, the artistic ensemble and I met for a total of 9 rehearsals. The rehearsal and devising process was intentionally fast-paced, so not much room existed to linger on moments or dig deep into the dramaturgy of the performance as we crafted it. The artistic team was made up of two performers, Kaci and Laura, and a musician, Jada. Later in the process, I invited a costume designer, Laura G., and a lighting designer, Bill, to join the team. I also invited a group of close colleagues to observe specific rehearsals and offer me feedback within the rehearsal process.

The artistic team and I met for rehearsals only once a week, and each week I structured the time with as much flexibility as I could while also offering some consistent structure. Before rehearsals, I wrote out a flexible plan for our two-hour rehearsal. Halfway through the 10-week process, we determined that 2 hours was not enough time each week and extended rehearsal by an hour. I intentionally kept the rehearsal periods as short as possible not only because I was working with performers who were also students with outside jobs, but also because I wanted to see how quickly and efficiently we could devise a TVY performance. I planned rehearsals with a bare-bones, flexible structure. the course of 10 weeks, the artistic team and I rehearsed for a total of 25 hours. In a typical rehearsal, we spent the first 20 minutes watching select portions of video from my observations at the Austin Preschool. Laura, Kaci and Jada shared out moments from the

video clips that they found surprising, funny, or notable. After watching the observations, I gave the performers devising prompt, or a "provocation[4]" and then let the performers improvise quickly and share back what they made. Often these short improvisations were filmed.

My observations at the Austin Preschool and my rehearsals with the adult performers happened simultaneously over the 10-week observation and rehearsal timeline for this thesis project. I visited Austin Preschool every Thursday for an hour and a half and recorded the preschoolers' playing. Between Thursday's observation and Sunday's rehearsal, I reviewed the video and listened to the audio. I looked and listened for moments between the young people that I interpreted as "authentic," out of the ordinary, entertaining (to me), filled with conflict, or otherwise surprising to me. Then, I took the most interesting (again, to me) moments and brought them into rehearsal to share with my artistic ensemble. The moments I chose in the observation process that were interesting to me and which I felt excited to investigate with my artistic team were subjectively chosen. As I reflect on my process, it is at this point that I might signal a shift in my process. I began to understand that my role as a director was to subjectively make artistic decisions regarding which performance material I wanted the team to focus on in the rehearsal hall.

In the beginning of the process, I imagined that the artists would devise new performance material at each rehearsal, inspired by the content collected from the

[4] A provocation example might be: "Building and Deconstructing: Build a 3-minute piece in which two characters open a box with a receipt roll inside (consider ways to get it out, receive or give the object), build a house with the receipt roll paper. Consider ways to share. What are ways you wait? What are ways you top each other's ideas?" (Chambers, Rehearsal Notes, 22 Sept. 2018)

preschoolers. Then, when I went back to the Austin Preschool the next week, I would have a clearer idea of what I was looking for in terms of our discoveries in rehearsal. I hoped that this circular method of watching, devising, revising, and repeating would manifest into a clear-cut and repeatable devising process. Toward the latter portion of the rehearsal period I wrote in my journal, "Watching the footage multiple times invariably shows me new and interesting elements of the children's play and offers me things I hadn't seen before" (Chambers, Reflective Practitioner Notes, 11 Nov 2018). In reviewing the tapes again, I notice the small interactions between the children with one another. For example, I spent a lot of time filming the children lined up waiting to use a "swing" which was just a long rope with a stick attached to it hanging from a tall tree. I have many minutes of tape of the children negotiating their space near the swing: communicating with their bodies, participating in both social and individual play, or simply existing on their playground. These small moments became a point of interest to talk about with the full artistic ensemble, and gave us a common vocabulary for the ways we understood the preschoolers relating to one another on the playground. Again, from my journal:

> In rehearsal, when we stop to talk about the small moments of interaction and relationships we see unfolding between the students, I'm always interested to see how these gestures show up in our devising. I have played around with a few different rehearsal styles. What feels most interesting to me though, rather than trying to mirror exactly what the young people are doing, is to let the language sit in the room, and see if it comes up naturally in Kaci and Laura's improvising. It's subtle, but this feels like a compromise or an intentional using of the observations from the preschoolers without imitating them or being too derivative of their playing.
>
> (Chambers, Reflective Practitioner Notes, 11 Nov 2018)

At the beginning of the devising process, I thought that the performance would come together logically—that each week the play, *Magic Box*, would write itself as we identified perfect moments that came out of the preschoolers' play. I assumed that I would notice moments in their play that lent themselves to creating a dramatic arc, or that we would notice interactions between young people that suggested playable relationships or recognizable characters. In our rehearsals, it was never our intention—mine or the artists—to perform a direct translation of what we saw in the observation footage. However, I wanted also to reflect the play we observed in the performance we were developing. It was my intention to honor the impulses of my creative team while simultaneously honoring the energy and physical gestures found inspiration from in the preschool playing. Ultimately, we found that the observations *inspired* the adult performers to play, but did not offer direct translations to the stage.

This process taught me that integrating the qualities of preschool play into an adult rehearsal process yields interesting artistic moments. When I started the devising process, I assumed that I would integrate specific moments from the preschool observations into the performance itself, and that those peer relationships would serve as the fodder for narrative building. However, it was much more interesting to both myself and to my artistic ensemble to find moments in the preschool footage that interested us, or inspired some quality of *play* and to then harness those qualities in the devising process. I wanted to honor and cultivate the artistic impulses of my adult artists, while also continuing to center the interests, relationships and experiences of the young people

for whom we made this performance. The footage offered the artistic team tools for inspiration rather than tools for mimicry. In an interview with the sound designer and devisor, Jada explained,

> […] we [watched] hours of footage [of the preschoolers] and would say, like, 'why was that kid running around with his shirt off?' but it's the little things about how they interact with each other and the things around them that I think we really pulled into creating this [performance] *for* them […]
>
> (Cadena, Personal Interview)

Retrospectively, I believe that this was an area of the rehearsal and devising process that shifted away from my original intent to specifically *center* young people as we built the performance. However, I feared that the process of devising TVY would be neither satisfying nor stimulating to the adult performers tasked with making the work if our main focus was to try to directly translate the preschool play into performance. I did not want to ask Laura, Kaci and Jada to *imitate* our three-year-old subjects, rather I wanted them to create their own artistic interpretation behind what we were observing in the preschool videos. I hoped that by watching the videos, the actors would be inspired to try out the physical gestures we saw the preschoolers use and put those gestures into in their own bodies. In similar devising processes, specifically in my experience devising new work in another PaperBoats project, my impulses for creative or imaginative play were welcome and cultivated in the rehearsal hall. The difference I was attempting to cultivate in this rehearsal process was to still invite the performance impulses (and expertise) of Jada, Kaci and Laura, while also continuously and intentionally drawing those improvisations directly to the preschool observations. In an interview between myself and

one of the performers, I asked Kaci, if in retrospect there were any moments that the work felt "satisfying" to make. She told me,

> I think that day when we discovered the umbrellas for the first time … I think that was the first day you brought the umbrellas, and we were supposed to make a scene with umbrellas, two chairs, and a few balls? … So, we had [a] song on, and I think [Laura and I] just realized that these umbrellas were very cool and I realized that I could put the umbrella between my legs while it was open which was just so fun. … I feel like, the umbrellas became such a big part of the story later.
>
> (Pelias, Personal Interview)

While the umbrellas were not inspired directly by the preschoolers, the umbrellas as objects for investigation became a source of joy and inspiration for Kaci and Laura during rehearsal. I realized during the devising and rehearsal process that the adult actors were creating with a sense of joy, rebellious play, and discovery that was similar to how the preschoolers played at the Austin Preschool. Rehearsals were short, but we spent most our time laughing and speaking animatedly about what we noticed in the observations. We developed a sort of short hand language to describe many moments that seemed to appear multiple time in the preschool playing. I have, what seems like, hours of footage of the Austin Preschool learners engaging in what I called previously "rebellious play," which, in our rehearsals we often referred to as "puppy tumbling." Kaci and Laura found moments in their improvising to "puppy tumble" through sequences of action that later became moments in the final performance that we especially wanted to keep. Coming into the process, I thought there might be more opportunities for the actors to visit the school with me each Thursday. I even initially thought we might lead a series of workshops with the preschoolers at the school to further integrate the artistic process

into the performance site. However, based on several limiting factors (namely actor conflicts and stringent observation rules from the preschool), only two of the performers could physically visit the preschool with me on a total of two visits. In my interview with Kaci, the performer who did not physically visit the Austin Preschool during the rehearsal process, she explained that the video documentation of the children was an asset to her process, saying, "well, I never got to go to the preschool, so by watching the [observation] footage I was able to really get a feel for like who these kids were, and just general behaviors of preschoolers which kind of helped to be like, 'oh, this is who I'm making this piece for ultimately'" (Pelias, Personal Interview). Although there was a distance between the adult actors and the young people in the observation tapes, Kaci, Laura and Jada recognized and grew fondness for the young people at the school and worked to honor their gestures in the devising.

Our process was full of laughter and ease, particularly as Kaci and Laura became more comfortable improvising with each other. The devising prompts I gave them were inspired by the physical gestures I observed from the preschool footage and when the actors engaged in these same play habits their creations were uniquely inspired. This artistic playing, again, was not a mimicry of the preschoolers' actions or play, but was inspired by the preschoolers' play habits.

Figure 1: Still from Austin Preschool observation footage; Still from *Magic Box* rehearsal footage.

CONCLUSION: FACILITATOR LEARNING IN A TVY MAKING PROCESS

Through the development of this TVY performance, I intended to bring an educational methodology, in this case a *Reggio Emilia* framework for open inquiry, together with the PaperBoats devising process. My inquiry for this chapter was: **What does it look like to intentionally center the play habits, rituals, and relationships of very young people in TVY through performance choices?** The ensemble of performers I worked with investigated this inquiry with me by looking specifically at the ways in which preschool aged learners engage with one another during their free time. I

imagined that the act of observing preschoolers during their free play and then drawing performance inspiration from those observations would add nuance to the PaperBoats devising process which I was previously familiar with. By the end of the rehearsal portion of this research project, my goal (to add an educational framework onto a devising process) still existed, but I have come to believe that an important step in devising TVY with a *Reggio* framework should involve a more deliberate and active integration of preschool students and their teachers in the *devising* process.

I expected during the observation process that I would capture moments of play between preschoolers that could then be directly reimagined and reinterpreted into performance pieces with an adult artistic ensemble. My original assumption was that the observations alone would be enough to "center" the interests and inquiries of the young people for whom we would perform. However, I found that even the observations of the preschoolers were different from what I expected. I assumed that I would be a neutral "observer of play" at the Austin preschool, but actually, I developed strong, playful relationships with the preschool students. Many of these relationships (between myself and the preschoolers) became central to the generative content that I brought into the rehearsal room with the artistic ensemble. This came as a surprise to me, as I thought perhaps (and hoped) that in this observation and devising process I would develop strong, reciprocal relationships with the teaching staff at the Austin Preschool. Before I began, I suspected that one way to bridge the arts/education divide was through observing and attending to a population of young people in an education space while simultaneously devising new theatre work. Out of fear, out of time constraints, and out of and

underdeveloped personal connection(s) with the Austin Preschool educators, I became much more invested in using my observation time to connect with the young people. The artistic ensemble, Jada, Kaci, Laura and I, gained a better perspective of and appreciation for the preschoolers at Austin Preschool, but we did not make these same connections with the Austin Preschool teachers.

While this relationship building between myself and the young people at the preschool was an artistically satisfying experience for *me*, in another iteration of this project, I suspect that the observation process would become more meaningful—not only for myself but also for the artists, educators, and young people involved—if the preschool education staff was brought into an observer role alongside the artistic ensemble more intentionally throughout the devising process. Reggio scholar and practitioner, Carolyn Edwards writes of the teacher's relationship to learners that,

> The teacher can help the children uncover their own insights or questions, perhaps expressed in a tentative or partial way—not fully clear to themselves of the group as a whole. The teacher […] steps in to restate the idea in clearer and more emphatic language, and thereby makes the insight operative for the children, a kind of intellectual spark for further talk and action (184).

Edwards reminds me that an essential area of expertise that the teacher-figure in a constructivist learning environment is, ideally, in tune with the community of young learners and their true insights or inquiries. Additionally, as an artist I found myself checking in with my personal interests and inspirations (what interested *me* and what interested the *adult artists*) throughout the process, but didn't make space for the young people or the Austin Preschool educators to also put their active aesthetic or dramaturgical eye on portions of the performance in process.

Chapter Three: TVY In Performance *Who's Really at the Center?*

In theatre, collective creativity does not take place only within the ensemble. It also develops from the interplay between actors and audience members. The audience is also a producer in the theatre.

—Geesche Wartemann ("Theatre as Interplay," 6)

I now shift my focus from centering a *Reggio* framework in a devising process, to a focus on youth engagement with the performance of *Magic Box* in order to investigate the question: **what, in practice, does it mean to center very young people in TVY performance?** In the previous chapter I identified ways in which the process of developing TVY with an educational framework is part of a process in bridging artists and educators. In this chapter, I explore the engagement behaviors of young people during the performances of *Magic* Box, and describe the influence of two key factors that affected youth behavior during those performances. I focused on moments of youth engagement during the three performances of *Magic Box* by watching videos of the performances and analyzing data captured through post-show surveys. Through my analysis, I looked for moments of youth engagement within the performances that could be defined as either *active* or *passive* engagement[5]. These labels of engagement are my own, applied subjectively to the body of observations I collected from the three performances. In analyzing the data, two significant factors emerged that significantly influenced youth engagement during the performances. Those factors were the

[5] The key distinction I make between "active" and "passive" engagement is in terms of physical movement. Passive engagement involves, primarily, eye-contact or focused looking, smiling or laughing. I determined engagement as "active" when participants moved from their seated positions, physically touched or played with props or other show materials, or spoke directly to another person.

performance environment and *adult intervention*. I posit that various forms of engagement by young people, and the factors that influence those engagement forms, signal some of the ways in which *Magic Box* centered, and failed to center, the experiences, relationships, and interests of young people. Centering the youth experience in a performance is one way I identify as central to bridging the tension between artists and educators.

In designing the performance experience of *Magic Box,* I worked under the assumption that a quality theatre experience for a young person would include some form of age appropriate participation. I knew that I wanted to include moments in which the audience engaged with (i.e. were invited to participate in) key moments of action that moved the play forward. Ben Fletcher-Watson notes that some participation in TVY is tyrannously designed. Fletcher-Watson makes the distinction between agentic and tyrannous participation of young people in theatre spaces, explaining, "Theatre for Early years relies on audience participation and often takes the form of a wholly participatory experience. For many audience members, these movements can be liberating, but others may feel unsettled by a tokenistic experience which appears to legitimize the artist's hegemonic status" (24). To better understand what it means to center the experiences of young people in TVY practice, I used two observation tools to collect data regarding the ways in which young people engaged with the performance of *Magic Box*. I gathered data from twelve Single Audience Member Observations[6] (four from the Austin Preschool

[6] The single audience member observations were a tool I designed for observers to watch and scribe the actions of one young audience member throughout the course of a performance. I asked that observers track participation of their student and to describe what they "notice[d] about their participation/ how they are or

performance, five from the 11am UT performance, and three from the 2pm UT performance), as well as from notes I took watching video recordings of the three performances. I also gathered data on student engagement through interviews with the performers. Although I met with and recorded an interview at the Austin Preschool with one of my partner teachers about a month after the performances, the recording was corrupted and I was only able to recall pieces of our conversation from memory.

The performers, Kaci Pelias, Laura Epperson and our musician Jada Cadena, performed the first full run of *Magic Box* at the Austin Preschool on the same playground I had observed the students' free play over the course of 10 weeks. The audience was made up of the 3-and-4-year-old class of students I had observer, other students in the Austin Preschool student body, parents, Austin Preschool teachers and staff, and graduate student observers. After the performance of *Magic Box* at the Austin Preschool, we moved the performance into a studio space in UT Austin's theatre building. In the studio space, our lighting designer, Bill Rios, added light cues, and Jada had access to full surround sound to project her sound cues.

In reviewing responses from the Single Audience Member Observation tool, watching the performance videos, and reading my written journal reflections for the performances, multiple categories of engagement emerged. However, for this research document I explore and analyze what I call *passive* and *active* engagement from the young audiences. The following is a description of the first performance of *Magic Box* at

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are not engaging with the performers and the performance." Observers tracked moments of participation from the student in alignment with every 10 minutes of the performance.

the Austin Preschool, followed by descriptions of both active and passive youth engagement. I analyze this data in terms of how passive and active engagement is informed by the performance environment and adult intervention. Next, I describe the subsequent two performances of *Magic Box* which took place at UT Austin, and analyze the role of both performance environment and adult intervention in those performances.

DESCRIPTION: AUSTIN PRESCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Performance Intro

The Austin Preschool performance had an audience size of about 20 young people, ranging from the 3-and 4-year-old students who were my research subjects, the younger 2-year-old class, 8 teachers, and approximately 15 adult caregivers and family members. The performance took place on the playground, and the students transitioned from their school day routine into the performance, moving literally from inside the school house to the outside playground. Before the show began, the two performers, Kaci and Laura, rolled out a large roll of receipt paper from the schoolhouse to the playing space and passed out ping pong balls to each of the young people. Some of the children walked on top of the unfurled paper roll that led from the school to the performance area which was indicated by a large blue tarp.

Jada, our musician, set up with her keyboard on a small picnic table to the right of the playing space. The actors sat the students around three sides of the perimeter of the playing space. Family members of the preschool students filtered into the performance area, entering through the side gate of the preschool where they picked up their students

from class every day. I invited the adult caregivers to sit anywhere in the performance area, and invited them to sit next to with their young person. Many of the adult caregivers sat about 10 feet away from the audience space and did not sit directly on the ground. The Austin Preschool teachers sat in and amongst the students. The performance started at 4pm, while the sun was still up but the sky was beginning to transform into dusk. It was cool outside, but not uncomfortable with a sweater.

As Kaci and Laura handed out ping pong balls to each of the students, the children almost immediately began rolling the ping pong balls on top of the tarped playing space, tossing them up in the air, and taking them from one another. Kaci and Laura non-verbally gestured to the students to hold the ping pong balls in their laps. This invitation was taken by some students, and some students continued to play with the ping pong balls. When the students had all gathered around the playing space, the performers and Jada looked to each other for a non-verbal agreement that the performance should start and the actors walked to their places upstage.

Jada played the theme music of the performance, and Laura and Kaci ceremoniously rolled out receipt roll paper, and then placed brown paper squares in front of each of the young audience members sitting around the perimeter of the stage. Kaci brought on a giant box; revealing the "nest" (i.e. a large pile of crumpled receipt roll paper that existed in the center of the stage throughout the duration of the performance), and Laura revealed a series of boxes, each containing small prop pieces that would be used later in the performance by placing them inside of the "nest." Laura's character modeled for the audience how to wrap their ping pong ball in the small square of brown

paper which was sitting in front of each person. This participatory moment in the performance took about three minutes to complete as the students and teachers worked together to place their ping pong balls into the paper and wrap them up. Some of the audience members did not participate in this action, while others threw their wrapped ping pong balls onto the performance space.

The actors then put on costume pieces, got into the paper nest, and placed the strips of paper from the nest on top of themselves to "hide" from the audience. This moment was intended to be a space where the two actors would transform from being "themselves" into their "characters." At this point, I observed the audience talking to Kaci and Laura as they got into the nest, shouting and repeating phrases like, "I can see you!" and "I see a box!" As I watched the students laughing and talking to the performers I felt a mixture of excitement and nerves. Some of the young audience members were bold in their willingness to shout out from the audience, and I noticed that the bolder some young people got the more other students joined in on the talking. I sat close to one of the Austin Preschool teachers. She was smiling and watching the performance, but also watching the other young people and giving "hush" signals to the crowd or physically holding onto some young people who were moving around the performance area. As the audience energy rose and became less focused on the actors, I wondered if the performers felt uncomfortable or if they would be able to reel the focus and attention of the young audience members in.

Performance Middle

The students grew more and more vocal when the actors got into the paper nest and "hid." Some young audience members moved onto the tarp and began to play with the paper nest and the actors inside. In the performance video, I watched and heard the young people's excitement escalating as they began verbally engaging with the performers on stage. At this point in the performance, the audience had been sitting for about 25 minutes (much longer than I had anticipated for this point of the play). One of the young people shouted, "throw the ball!" to one of his classmates. One person threw or possibly dropped their ball onto the tarp and the ball rolled toward the actors. Kaci and Laura continued their performance, mirroring each other and sitting inside the nest. As Laura leaned to the right, one of the "hidden" props, a box that contains wooden balls for a later moment in the show, became visible and one of the young people shouted, "I see a box!" At almost the same moment, the student who dropped their ball onto the tarp crawled onto the playing space to grab it. Many other young people followed onto the stage. One young person took hold of the paper nest and pulled it, laughing. A young person ran behind the nest, crossing the stage completely. There was laughter and noise coming from the young people as they threw their balls and reached into the nest. I observed that Kaci and Laura looked at each other and at the nest. The Austin Preschool teachers started to stand and grab some of the young people.

In this moment, the actors attempted to indicate non-verbally to the audience that they should remain seated. They gestured to the student's seats. I wondered if they would make eye contact with me—I was unclear if they felt like the performance was out of

control, or if they felt like it was manageable and that they could keep going. Kaci and Laura continued their previously choreographed action; they appeared to hesitate with each action but kept going. I wasn't sure at this moment what my role was and whether I should jump up to stop the show and re-set, or just keep watching. I wondered if the actors would improvise in response to the young audience members who were talking directly to them. The seated audience also appeared distracted by the young people playing with the paper nest and the rolling ping pong balls. One of the Austin Preschool teachers came over to me to ask me if they should discipline or stop the children from speaking. I felt my heart rate increasing and a rush of panic settle over me. I made the decision to stand up from my seated position in the audience and ask the young audience members to go back to their seats. After my vocal announcement, the Austin Preschool teachers began to hush the students, and, in some cases, to physically remove some audience members from the performance space.

After some brief re-setting and after waiting for the young people to get back to their seats, Kaci and Laura resumed their performing. They altered or skipped some of their previously rehearsed choreography, namely a moment when Kaci's character was supposed to throw an entire box of wooden balls out into the audience from inside of the nest. I felt relieved that Kaci skipped this part of the performance, but also felt a twinge of disappointment. In our rehearsals, this moment of "planned chaos" was one that we looked forward to sharing with the audience. I felt some frustration with myself for not anticipating the ways in which the performance might result in *unplanned* chaos, and wondered if the actors were feeling stressed and/or underprepared. The performers

remained in character throughout the performance by reacting and responding non-verbally to vocalizations from the students in the audience. The young audience members reacted vocally and physically to the introduction of new props in the space (exhibiting excited gestures, gasps, whispering or talking to peers, making exclamations of enjoyment, and trying to grab at the props), most notably when the characters brought out an umbrella and Laura's character blew up and released balloons into the audience space. I noticed the students were not responding to the music or sound cues that Jada was playing in the background throughout the performance. In that moment, I also noticed that performing outdoors was also more difficult than I had anticipated. The temperature was dropping and the uneven surface of the performance space was making moments of the choreography look sloppier than what I saw in rehearsals.

Performance Outro

As the performance ended, the actors invited the participants to bring their wrapped ping pong balls (those that still had theirs) onto the performance area, and into the large paper nest. During this portion of the performance, the students eagerly got up from their seats and placed, or tossed, their objects into the nest. Many of the students lingered next to the nest to play with the paper, and some folks got inside of it. In the rehearsal room, we anticipated that this participatory moment would be slow and delicate, and that the actors would have to lead one young audience member at a time up to the nest to place the wrapped balls. Instead, once the invitation to stand up and move to the nest was given, most of the young people stood up and looked around for objects to place

inside the nest and walked up onto the playing space in a big group. Many of the students ripped and threw the paper in a playful, joyful manner. Some young people left the area quickly and joined other young people playing on the playground equipment behind the stage. The performance had started with a "soft start" and so too did it end, with children lingering to play in the paper nest, and parents waiting to collect their children. I stood up and thanked the audience for coming and asked them to please stay for a few minutes to fill out a survey with their student.

ANALYSIS: AUSTIN PRESCHOOL PERFORMANCE

In my analysis of the data from the observation tools and the audience surveys, I noticed that two of the most prevalent forms of young audience engagement could be described as *active* or *passive*. I define "active engagement" as that which involves the audience member physically moving out of a seated position, and interacting with props. I also include verbalization, defined as young audience members making audible vocalizations, spoken reactions, or asking questions, as active engagement. On the "passive" side of the engagement scale, I include audience participation in the form of smiling, laughing, and exhibiting other facial expressions. I also include neutral but attentive watching, even when there is no discernable expression on the young audience participant's face.

When reviewing the performance footage, I anticipated that I would primarily see forms of "active engagement," however, I was surprised to see that students sat relatively quietly and attentively for almost 15 minutes without vocally or physically engaging with

the performance. The students were asked to sit and watch the performance for much longer than any of us on the artistic team had intended and with very few invitations for them to interact. Therefore, by the time the large paper nest was dropped into the center of the playing space, the young audience, unsurprisingly, was eager to participate vocally and physically with the performers and the props.

While analyzing the observations of this performance (and later the two performances at UT Austin), I noticed several factors, both socially and physically constructed, that influenced the ways in which young audience participants engaged with the performances. Two of these factors, namely the performance environment and moments of adult intervention, help me understand how *Magic Box* has the potential to center young people better, and point to areas for refinement, revision, and specific changes for the next iteration of this piece.

Influence of Performance Environment on Youth Engagement at Austin Preschool

One of the largest influences on performing *Magic Box* at the Austin Preschool was the performance space itself. Almost all the young audience members were students or previous students of the school, and were intimately familiar with the outdoor playground on which we performed. The young people sat near their classmates, and near their preschool teachers. Because many of them knew me, some students wanted to sit on or near me when I sat down to watch the performance. I suggest that the students' familiarity with their surroundings, with the adults, with one another, and with their playground contributed to their comfort and willingness to speak openly to the

performers of *Magic* Box. Not surprisingly, the very loose and open rules of the playground played out during our performance.

I also learned that the performance space itself distracted from the performance. From where the audience was sitting, the playground and playground equipment were entirely in view. There were no light cues to help focus the attention of the action on stage, and the sound design was difficult to hear. For these reasons, I suspect that the young audience was not as easily pointed toward the story or narrative as they were hooked by the novel props and characters on stage (including wooden balls, a giant pile of paper, and adults who only made expressive noises to communicate). When designing *Magic Box*, I intentionally wanted to the performance to take place outside within playing space that I had been visiting and observing the children. In my early planning, I intended for the performance to transform the outdoor space, and be set in response to the elements of the playground. This goal, for me was tied to my intention to frame the performance with a *Reggio* philosophy, and I originally wanted the performance content to include the natural outdoor world of the playground I had observed the preschoolers playing on. However, as we moved into the rehearsal process I put less emphasis on developing a set design that considered the Austin Preschool playing space than I originally planned. The set design of *Magic Box* was more a product of our indoor rehearsal space than it was in response to the playground. I purchased a large brown tarp which I thought would blend in with the dirt ground we would perform on at the Austin Preschool, but provide a "cleaner" surface for the performers to act on. In the rehearsal though, I discovered how much more I liked the bright blue surface of the tarp, located on the backside. In some

ways, my dreams to incorporate the outdoor assets of the preschool were overridden by my excitement over aesthetic choices that I found personally appealing. In retrospect, I could have embraced the outdoor space more intentionally through the set design and other performance enhancing gestures from the adult actors. The performance space was surrounded by trees, a playground swing set and slide, a giant sand box, tables, and some outdoor toys. A major learning moment for me came in discovering that I had not designed a performance set-up that enhanced, or conversely, disguised the outdoor space. I had directed the actors to interact with each other through their facial expressions (indicating their feelings for one another), and directed the performers to make each movement deliberately and, sometimes, quite slowly. These factors contributed, I believe, to the ways the young audience members seemed to lose interest in what was happening on stage. Retrospectively, I would like to have incorporated more visually appealing design choices that incorporated the trees and other natural elements surrounding us. At one point, early in the devising process, I even dreamed of making the performance a traversing piece, meaning I wanted to place different moments of performance action in different areas of the playground and for the performers and audience to move. None of these ideas were realized in part because I did not ever feel like I had resources (time, energy, ability) to plan to build an installation on the Austin Preschool playground, and partially because I had avoided the inclusion of the young people or educators to help me understand how certain design choices would affect the engagement of the performance throughout the rehearsal.

I assumed that when Kaci, Laura, Jada and I arrived at the preschool to set up for the performance, that the space would just "make sense" to me. Though we had rehearsed for weeks at UT, we had never performed *Magic Box* in the preschool space, let alone in any outdoor space. I picked an area of the playground that had enough room to fit the large tarp and seat the audience. I knew that we would be set-up on a slight hill, and frankly, hoped for the best. A key learning moment for me was realizing that being outside made it difficult for the audience to suspend their disbelief, or focus directly on the performance alone. Some young people wandered away from the playing space, or walked on top of the tarp, or removed themselves to play on the playground equipment when, I assume, they were less engaged with the performance. The audience did not respond to the play's characters in the ways that I anticipated. For example, I directed the performers to "hide" several props inside of the paper nest in full view of the audience. The actors completed this action in the play by looking at the audience secretively, as if to let them "in" on the fact that these objects were "hidden" or had "disappeared from view"[7] and into the nest. The students at the Austin Preschool, who were quite actively and physically engaged with the performance at this moment, spoke to the performers and began to chant loudly at the actors, yelling, "I've got magic eyes!" and "I can still see it!" referring to the hidden objects in the paper nest (*Observation A: Magic Box*). I hadn't anticipated that the young audience would speak so directly to the performers on stage,

[7] PaperBoats director, Dave Brown refers to this performance gesture as "declaring" an action to the audience. I have found it both useful and compelling in TVY work to hook audiences' attention by declaring moments on stage, but in the performance of *Magic Box* with the Austin Preschool audience I found that, despite actors' "declaring" their actions to the audience, some young audience members still spoke out expressed disagreement with the performers.

and neither had the actors. In a post-performance interview with Kaci, she described the umbrella moment and other factors that influenced the young audience's engagement. Kaci recalls,

> I think because we were outside and on a sloped surface, some of the theatricality was not something [the young people] were used to. Even though I think they were very willing to accept the avant-garde nature of the play, when we brought out our umbrellas [the audience] started yelling at us about how it wasn't raining [laughs]. I think they started even chanting at us! I think that was mainly because we were outside and they were very aware that it wasn't raining.
>
> (Pelias, Personal Interview)

My aim to make and perform *Magic Box* for the Austin Preschool students on their playground was an effort to center their experiences and interests. In looking at the video footage, I wonder how I might have prepared the performers to engage with the audience members more strategically within this specific outdoor setting. The young audience members engaged with the outdoor playing space in ways that I hadn't anticipated, but retrospectively, are not surprising to me. The ground had an inclined surface, therefore the young people rolled the balls we provided them on the hill. When objects that were indicated to be "hidden" were revealed, the young audience members seemed to delight in shouting out to the performers that what they were seeing. When the actors pulled out umbrellas and opened them onstage, the young people shouted the obvious: it wasn't actually raining! So much of the Austin Preschool performance looked to me like it was chaotically out of control. In my interviews with the performers after the show they expressed to me their exhaustion and even some fear around the moments on stage where they felt like the young audience members were "rushing the stage" (Pelias, Personal

Interview). I learned in this performance how much I had taken for granted in designing a show that had very few set boundaries and no verbally expressed rules for engagement for either the young audience members or their adult caregivers. This learning touches upon my own tensions in simultaneously wanting to give to the young people ownership and agency to move, participate, or engage based on their impulses, while *also* learning that my role as a TVY director is to help everyone in the performance (audience and artists alike) know *how* to engage with the performance.

Influence of Adult Intervention on Youth Engagement at Austin Preschool

In reviewing the performance footage and analyzing responses recorded from the Single Audience Member surveys, I wondered how and in what ways adults (both caregivers, and the performers) influenced the engagement of the young audience members. In the Austin Preschool performance, one of the most significant relationships that I observed was the relationship between the preschoolers and their teachers. This relationship of teacher/student was expressed primarily through how the teachers at the Austin Preschool redirected "disruptive" behavior. Because of this dynamic, I paid special attention to the moment of the performance in which I felt that tension and surprise were most visible, and subsequently the moment when I noticed significant adult intervention. This moment happened when Kaci and Laura's characters were sitting in the nest and many of the young people in the audience began to chant that they could see the hidden box on stage, and then began to physically interact with the paper nest. It was at this point that I perceived the audience engagement to be a disruption to the

performance and I stood up in an attempt to redirect the audience's behavior to a passive form of engagement. One of the observers noted of a young audience member,

> [The child] says, 'I can see your butt!' when Kaci pokes up from the nest. Finally throws his wrapped ball after prompted by other kids. Comes right up to nest until a grown-up pulls him back. Pulls on the paper and starts ripping/tossing it when Lina intervenes … Grownup joins him and appears to be trying to get him to leave, but he keeps watching. [He is] escorted out when the umbrella leaves the nest. Keeps watching as grown-up leads him out. (Audience Interview A).

I waited for about two minutes while many of the young audience members got onto the stage area. As this happened, the actors continued with their performances and the teachers whispered to the students and to each other about how and if they should respond. I remember feeling so miserable and sacred that I had failed the performers and the Austin Preschool teachers in that moment. I stood up and announced to the audience, "My friends, my friends, put your arms up in the air!" This was a tactic I have employed previously as a preschool teacher to call in the attention of a group of students.

Figure 2: Performance Observation Still of *Magic Box* at Austin Preschool

Because of my position as guest artist and director of the performance, I felt like it was my responsibility to assure the Austin Preschool teachers that the students were not misbehaving. However, even though I wanted the adults to let the young audience participants engage with the performance in any way they wanted, my ego and concern about what the other adult might have wanted, outweighed my research curiosity. My overriding impulse became to stand up and invite the audience to get back into their seats so that everyone in the audience could see and hear and so the performers could continue with what they had rehearsed. As the director, I felt responsible for making sure that Kaci and Laura didn't feel like they had to continue the performance if they felt unsafe or like the performance couldn't get back on track. As the guest artist at the preschool, I wanted the performance to look and feel professional—possibly, in retrospect, I think this meant

"in control." Ultimately, in the moment, I felt like there was nothing I could do *except* for reset the performance and invite the youth to sit outside the playing space once again.

DESCRIPTION: UT AUSTIN PERFORMANCES

The second two performances of *Magic Box* took place a few days after the Austin Preschool performance at The University of Texas at Austin in a small black box theatre space. In attendance were members of the public whom I had invited or who had heard about the performances by word of mouth. The UT performances took place indoors in a classroom which was converted into a performance studio. As I wrote above, I worked with a lighting designer, Bill Rios, to build a lighting sequence for these performances. Additionally, my sound designer Jada had access to a full sound system and could manipulate her sound design to fill the performance space in a more targeted way. The two UT performances had smaller audiences than at the preschool, and far fewer young people overall. The 11am UT performance had a total of ten children under the age of twelve, and around twenty-five adults. The 1pm performance had four young people under the age of eight and around fifteen adults. Audiences at UT moved from the foyer of the theatre building, where a series of lightly facilitated activities were set up, into the stage area.

At both UT performances, Laura, Kaci and I guided all the audience members through the doors from the foyer into the theatre space. As the audience entered the performance space, they saw string lights hanging from the ceiling which gave a faint, festive glow to the otherwise darkened space. In addition to the floor seating, we set up

about 15 chairs around three sides of the perimeter of the space for any audience members who did not want to sit on the ground. Young people were invited to sit on the floor around the perimeter of the space, as we had done at the preschool. As the audience members took their seats, Laura and Kaci passed out wooden balls and vocally asked the students to carefully hold onto them in their laps. Jada played live electronic keyboard music while the audience members settled into their seats on the ground. In both performances, the young people sat on the floor with their adult care giver, sometimes sitting on laps. Many adult audience members joined the young people on the floor after Laura invited them to do so.

Performance Intro

Both performances began with a shift in the lights and the actors entering upstage with a spotlight on their position. Jada's sound design was loud and present in the space, and many of the actors' movements were punctuated with electronic keyboard sounds. Kaci and Laura set up the playing space with the rolls of receipt paper. As Kaci and Laura rolled out the paper rolls and established their characters, the audience was quiet and watched the performers, and then laughed at their facial expressions and vocal outbursts. Some of the audience members sat quite close to their caregivers. One observer noted that their young audience member, "…started out really scared and sat against her mom. Her mom wants her to sit on the edge of the stage but she's glued to mom, facing away from the stage. Mom sits with her. Laura gives her a ball and she's very interested. Very attentive and aware of performers' movements. She's very focused and checking

out what the other kids are doing" (*Observation B, Magic Box*). I noticed the adults in the audience smiling and watching both the performers and their young people. There were several moments of big laughter from the adult audience members as the relationship dynamics of the characters were established throughout the set-up of the space. During both performances when Kaci brought on the large box containing the paper nest and dumped it into the center of the stage, the young people in the audience gasped. Laura led the audience through the interactive sequence of placing the wooden ball inside a small square of paper, wrapping it, and then putting it next to their seat. During both performances, the young audience members followed along with this invitation from Laura, placing their wooden balls into the square pieces of paper Kaci and Laura passed out. In some cases, the adult caregivers helped their young audience members with the wrapping. In both performances, it took the audience a few moments to understand what Laura was them to do. The realization that everyone should follow along with what she was doing occurred in rolling succession.

Figure 3: Performance Still from *Magic Box* performance at UT.

Performance Middle

When the performers got into their paper nest, the lights dimmed to almost complete darkness. I heard the audience murmur to each other. One young audience member exclaimed, "it's getting dark in here!" One observer described, "[the young audience participant gave a] big laugh [when the actors] entered the nest. He's staring with eye eyes, standing with his cheek against his mom's. Very vocal. Dad puts a binky in the child's mouth" (*Observation B, Magic Box*). Kaci popped out of the nest, which was punctuated with a sharp sound cue from Jada, and the two actors began their choreographed sequence of playing inside of the nest: introducing the umbrella props, tossing more wooden balls onto the performance space, and blowing balloons. I observed

young audience participants laughing or vocalizing an audible response, which then elicited laughter from the adult audience members. In the first performance, there were two young audience participants who were siblings. Throughout the performance, the pair chatted with each other, made loud conversation to the performers and sometimes to their caregiver (seated across the room from where the young people were sitting), and even got up at a certain point to sit upstage under the prop table. There was also one very young audience participant who was pre-verbal. They sat with their caregivers throughout the performance. I noticed this young person verbally cooing and responding to the performers, the lights, and the props. There were several moments where this audience member crawled onto the stage and was then held back by their caregiver and encouraged to remain seated outside of the playing space.

Like the performance at the preschool, I observed different forms of vocal engagement from the audience including laughter, gasping, and movement, particularly during the introduction of the balloons. One of the observers at the second performance at UT tracked an audience member who was vocal and percussive throughout portions of the performance, noting,

> [the child is] laughing at Kaci and Laura getting into the nest. When the lights went out, child gasped. Claps offbeat like wanting to coax performers out. Almost laughing at performers' big faces. Slaps the floor, claps, and laughs … Goes onto the stage and grabs wooden balls that are on the floor after Kaci dumps them out. Clacks the balls together, making nose. Throws both balls back onto the stage and caregiver touches shoulder to stop. Frowns.
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> (*Observation C, Magic Box*)

The engagement described in this observation shows the range of engagement one young audience member exhibited while watching the performance. It should be noted that this person's impulse to throw the balls back onto the stage and make noise in response to the characters was not interpreted (from what this observer or I experienced) by the audience as "disruptive" behavior, or behavior that elicited redirection from an adult audience member. I speak more to this phenomena in the analysis section regarding audience intervention.

The lighting designer underscored the balloon playing sequence between Kaci and Laura with a display of colorful moving lights which captured the attention of many of the audience members. Many of the individual audience member observations noticed their participants giggling at the balloons, clapping, letting out squeals, and even running after the balloons when they were released into the audience. One observer described their young person as follows: "[the young person] reaches out hands to try to grab the balloon when it floated away. Ran toward door to catch balloon and tried to take it from another child. Shouts, 'hey! I want one!'… Laughs at the balloon pop" (*Observation B, Magic Box*).

Performance Outro

During the final portion of the performance, which is notated in the script as the moment that Laura exits the nest and joins Kaci on stage with her umbrella, the young audience participants at both performances remained attentive to the action of the performers. In both performances, the actors invited the audience to put their wrapped

objects into the nest, and in both performances, the young audience started—sometimes with hesitancy and then with enthusiasm—to move onto the performance space and place their wrapped wooden balls into the nest. The audience observers for the second UT performance noted "Kaci invite[s] the young person] to put the ball into the nest. She slowly stands up and puts the ball very carefully into the nest. She has a happy smile on her face when Kaci smiles at her. She waves at Laura and Kaci when they wave to the audience" (*Observation C, Magic Box*).

After both performances, I gave a brief speech in which I thanked the audiences for coming and then explained how the post-show surveys would be administered. Many young audience members stayed in the playing space, climbing into the giant box, playing with the receipt paper nest, tossing and ripping it, and rolling the ping pong balls. Audience members filtered out of the performance space roughly 10 to 15 minutes after the final applause.

ANALYSIS: UT AUSTIN PERFORMANCES

Influence of Performance Environment on Youth Engagement at UT

The UT performances were, in many ways, easier for me to understand and analyze in terms what was "working" or "not working" in part because these performances took place indoors and in a recognizable theatre space. At UT, there was a clearly marked audience seating area for both caretakers and young people to sit together or in chairs around the perimeter of the stage. There were aesthetically pleasing, colorful stage lights that illuminated the playing space and made the audience area dark. The play

space existed in a room dedicated solely to the production, as opposed to the familiar playground space that the Austin Preschool students watched *Magic Box* on. I noticed that in general, young people who sat directly in their caregiver's laps watched the performance passively (with neutral expressions). Young people who sat further away from their caregivers, seemed to engage more actively.

In addition to audience make-up and the youth/adult ratio at UT, the seating arrangement and physical proximity of young people to their caretakers greatly influenced the ways in which the young audience engaged with *Magic Box*. In many instances observers noticed the young people interacting with their caretaker (as opposed to other young people in the audience). Many of the vocalized reactions to the performance in the UT space were in the form of commentary or questions asked to caretakers. During the second UT performance one observer noted,

> [The child] turn[s] to mom with anticipation when performer was about to rip paper. Face turning back and forth to see both performers. 'Why are they stepping on those?' to mom. Laughter when paper tore. Leaned back/into mom when nest came out quickly but also remained laughing. (*Observation C, Magic Box*)

While an observer in the first UT performance noted,

> [The child asks] 'what's in there?' clearly watching. Laughing, smiling. Very engaged watching performers. Up out of mom's lap. Nest is dropped, [the child is] looking at mom and dad with eyes wide. (*Observation B, Magic Box*).

There were many interactions in the UT performances where observers noted that the adults helped young audience members with participation moments in the performance (e.g. wrapping a ping pong ball in paper). According to the observation reports, the balloon blowing section of the play was also particularly captivating to the young

audience members at both UT performances. The lighting designer, Bill, designed lights for the balloon scene which we referred to as "party lights." As Laura blew up the balloons, the lights would get more colorful and reflect large circles of bright neon colors on the ground. Several observers noted that young audience members were captivated by the lights, looking up at the ceiling, and making loud squealing noises or expressing wide, open smiling faces. An observer noted of one young person, "lots of giggling at two balloons. Loud squeal of delight when balloons flew out of [performance space] … Repeated, 'man!' and became aware of lights and started looking upwards at [lighting] changes" (*Observation C, Magic Box*).

Observers noted passive, non-verbal youth engagement throughout the UT performances. One young audience member in the first UT performance sat in their caretaker's lap for almost the entirety of the show (*Observation B, Magic Box*). During points of the play when Kaci and Laura's characters gestured for audience members to wrap their ping pong balls in small pieces of brown paper, and, toward the end of the show, put those wrapped items into the paper nest, this young audience participant was reticent to initiate movement of any physical engagement without their caretaker. (*Observation B, Magic Box*).

In investigating environmental influencers of the engagement behaviors of young audience members in the UT performances, I am struck by how much easier it was to direct (or control) audience behavior. The set design influenced the mood of the space: literally making the space dark in all places except where we wanted the audience's attention to be focused. I also suspect that the number of adults in the space (at least one

adult per young person, and an additional group of adult audience members in both performances), and the fact that the young people in the audience were not "at school" also contributed to the relative "passive" engagement of the youth audience members. My impulse at first was to have tension with this discovery: was I only satisfied or happy with youth engagement if it came in the form of controlled behavior? The analysis of the UT performances contributed to my learning that my role as artist/facilitator in a TVY performance space was to help audiences know and understand how design structure *supported* engagement from the young audience participants.

Influence of Adult Intervention on Youth Engagement at UT

In addition to the indoor parameters of the performance space, I noticed that *who* was in the performances seemed to influence the youth engagement. The audience at UT was made up of many more adult audience members than young people. Some of the adults in the audience were familiar with my work, or were at least familiar with other examples of TVY performances. The young people and caregivers in the audience knew about the *Magic Box* performances from either word of mouth, or directly from people who knew me or the performers personally. I suspect that these factors, the higher ratio of adults to young audience participants and the familiarity with me personally, contributed to the ethos and environment of the audience and to the performances.

Reactions that young people had to elements of the performance, particularly moment of laughter, but also moments when young people asked questions loudly about what was happening on stage, elicited laughter from adults in the audience. As explored

above, many of the observers documented moments of direct interaction between young people and their caregivers in the UT performances. The adults in both UT performances were quick to laugh at the performances, responding to the clown-like characters and physical humor exhibited by the performers. More than the performance though, the audience in both UT performances clearly responded to the young audience members' enjoyment of the performance. When a young person laughed, showed surprise and wonder, made a comment out loud about what they were seeing, or asked a question about what was going to happen, the adult audience members often turned their heads to watch the young people or answer their questions in a whisper, or laugh at the young audience's laughter.

During one part of the first UT performance, two siblings who were seated together but apart from their caregiver were particularly physically active throughout the performance, even moving from their seated positions at one point and hiding under the prop table for a portion of the show. An observer noted of one of the siblings,

> [The child] crawls onto the tarp a few times, snags a ping pong ball and throws it. Takes real pleasure at this engagement. Asks, 'is she going to pop it?' about Laura and the balloon. Seems sad when Laura released the balloon, but then a balloon comes to him and he says, 'I want to get one' and reaches toward the two balloons as Laura blows them up … Goes back to drawing but this time his back is toward the performers. At one point, he gets up and walks away [from the performance area], following his sister backstage. They disappear … he is hanging out underneath the prop table.
>
> (*Observation B, Magic Box)*

Though a caregiver was in attendance, they did not choose to intervene when the young people got up from their seats. I noticed that at UT, the audience of adults "allowed" the young people to explore the space in an unexpected, or rebellious way: something that

both surprised and delighted me. I suspect that this happened because each caregiver only needed to be responsible for *their* young person. At the time that these two young audience members left the area, I felt nervous that they would distract other young people from watching the play, or that other young people would join the two under the prop table. This fear was not realized, but I am still thinking about why that behavior (hiding under the prop table) feels disruptive. Centering the audience and the audience impulses does not necessarily mean prioritizing and supporting *all* youth engagement.

I noticed some adult audience intervention particularly with a young audience member who was under the age of my intended age range (three to five years old). Throughout the observation of this young audience member, the observer noted moments when the young person attempted to crawl onto the performance space and their caregiver gave resistance. The observer notes, "the [caregiver starts] holding [child's] sweater to keep kid from crawling onto stage during balloon inflation. [The child is] very eager to come play with balloons. A couple of loud vocal releases. Started rolling around looking at other kids/parents" (*Observation B, Magic Box*). In observing the video tape of this moment, I notice that the other audience members (both young and adult) did not exhibit an instinct to intervene when the baby showed interest in going on stage, and, in fact, there were several moments when the audience gasped in delight at the baby's expression of interest at the play. This young person did not ever move onto the stage in such a way that it disrupted the action of the performance. At the Austin Preschool, the young people who came onto the stage exhibited such eagerness in playing with the paper and props on stage (often in a rebellious manner) that the adults watching the performance (myself included) felt the impulse to intervene to protect and manage the planned sequence of events in the play. The "rebelliousness" exhibited by the young audience members in the UT performances never escalated to the point where the

performers or other adult audience members saw that the performance could not move forward without intervention.

CONCLUSION: FACILITATOR LEARNING IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT OF TVY

In considering the various forms of engagement that I observed throughout the three performances of *Magic Box*, I formed several conclusions relating back to my research question: **what, in practice, does it mean to center very young people in a TVY performance?** First, I have come to believe that rebellious young audience engagement is a valuable and necessary form of engagement from young people. I expected that there would be a wide variety of ways in which young people engaged with the TVY performance. However, I did not understand the relationship and tensions between young people's enthusiastic, active, and often rebellious forms of participation and the adult audience's hesitancy to support this engagement. I was particularly surprised when I observed this in myself. I recognized in adult audience members the impulse to intervene when young people participated with the performance in ways that they might have perceived to be disruptive, rebellious, or vocally loud, specifically when that participation disrupted the action of the performance itself. As I have engaged in the writing process of this document, I have come to realize that centering a young audience does not necessarily mean giving total agency to the young audience to interact in ways that halt the forward momentum of the performance. On the other hand, I learned how sensitive *I* was as a director, observer, and audience member and that I experienced tension around wanting to center *my* artistic vision of how the youth audience should engage with *Magic Box*.

Although I initially thought The Austin Preschool audience was not engaged in the performance, watching the videos and reading the observation reports revealed that most of the students were both engaged and eager to participate in elements of the *Magic Box* performance. However, the participatory behaviors that many youth audience members at the Austin Preschool enacted (i.e. chanting at the actors, pulling at the paper nest, rolling or throwing their wooden balls onto the stage) were not behaviors that supported the momentum of the performance. The frustration I experienced, alongside the adult actors and the Austin Preschool teachers, arose from the absence of clear framework for the performance's expectations of audience participation. The teachers at the Austin Preschool were able to wrangle the young people on their playground, and my interest in troubling that position was actually counter to their jobs. As a parent or caregiver, there are rules and expectations (both overtly constructed and socially agreed upon) for how young people should act in a theatre space. I understand more clearly how young audiences and their adults are willing to participate and may need to know the "rules" of engagement either as we begin or as we move through the performance. I am curious about the rules of place and space, and how those rules or expectations ultimately inform behavior habits that might transfer into participation in a performance. Through my analysis of both performances, but looking particularly at the Austin Preschool performance, I also observed a connection between the rules of the space (preschool), and the role of the adult audience member in the school environment. The adults in the Austin Preschool removed the children and disciplined the children as though they were in a traditional school classroom with no acceptance of disruptive behavior (when that

behavior looked like audience members "not watching" or "not watching *quietly*.") Additionally, the adults in the space (teachers, parents, actors, and myself) appeared to feel responsible for upholding traditional school behavior and performance watching practices (i.e. making the children sit quietly, and listen attentively). I suspect that if I were to provide the teachers, the actors, and the young audience members with a clearer expectation of the rules for the performance space, I would have felt less anxiety over how the young people engaged with the performance. What might a performance of *Magic Box* look if it anticipated "disruptive" behavior or engagement from young audience participants? If I built strategic invitations for active engagement with the performance to exist without disrupting the experiences of other audience participants or the flow of the show, would I be centering the experience of young people and relying on my own expertise as a maker? How might I rely on the adults in a TYV performance space co-construct a safe environment for young people to exhibit their impulses through play?

Upon my reflection and analysis of the *Magic Box* performances, I conclude that a major space for growth exists in distinguishing between *free play* and *a play.* In theory, I assumed that by performing a theatre piece that reflected (i.e. drew inspiration from) preschool play, young people would recognize and engage with the performance by watching attentively. I assumed that the young audiences would engage actively in the performance only when the adult performers gave the young people cues, and that any outliers would not disrupt the overall flow of the performance. In the UT performances, I was able to rely on the theatre space to help the audience (both adults and young people)

focus their attention on the performance. I also saw and understood how the adults in the performance space influenced some behavior of the young people. At the Austin Preschool performance space, I saw how the performance (whether I meant for it to or not) lacked the structures it needed to help audience members understand how to participate within the performance environment. I also learned how important it is to lay out clear expectations for how I expect all audience members to engage with the performance.

As I move into the final concluding chapter of this document, I expand on my learning from the previous chapters and move toward recommendations for addressing and bridging the gap between art making and education in a TVY making context.

Chapter Four: Building Toward a Blended TVY Making Space

With this thesis, I investigated what happens when TVY makers center the experiences of young people in a devising process. I wondered what it looked like to center a young audience within the making process by observing their play routines and practices in an educational setting. I situated this inquiry in the in-between space between artistry and education—a longstanding spectrum that, in its current state, represents a tense and sometimes conflicted relationship. I wondered how including an educational framework within an artistic devising process might inform the artistic product, and how the young people for whom we performed might engage with TVY.

I started this project with the suspicion that I might learn more about how to create quality performance content for young people if I first observed how they themselves played with each other during recess or free play time. Additionally, I wondered how adult theatre artists might create new performance material in a process that centered preschool play. I suspected that if adult actors made performance choices that were inspired by young people's playing habits, they (the artists) would be more likely to respect and understand the aesthetic preferences of very young audiences during performances. To learn how preschool aged students played with each other, I observed a population of 3- and 4-year-olds' play habits during recess at their school and filmed those observations. I then selected moments from the observations, and shared them with the artistic ensemble each week to as part of a devising process. Our aim in this project was to devise and perform an original work that centered the experiences, physical gesture, and relationships found in peer-to-peer preschool playing.

In this thesis project and throughout this document, I asked the following research questions:

1. **What happens when I center an educational theory in a TVY theatre making process?**
2. **What does it look like to intentionally center the play habits, rituals, and relationships of very young people in TVY through performance choices?**

I made discoveries about how a TVY performance maker might intentionally observe play routines and rituals of a preschool population and subsequently use those observations to create a shared artistic language for artists to use in a devising process. Through our rehearsal process, the artistic ensemble and I discovered that mimicking young people's playing yielded less artistically satisfying performance modules than when we used the preschoolers' physicality and peer relationships to inspire original, impulsive play. A key finding of this study is that acts of rebellion in students' spontaneous play can offer artistic teams meaningful content for generating performance material. In the observation and rehearsal process, we found moments of rebellious participation in games to be both satisfying to perform (as adult artists) and provided multiple opportunities for audiences to engage with the performance. I also discovered that "centering" an educational theory in a devising process does not necessarily mean that the young people were centered in the making process. I continue to crave using a constructivist education model to strengthen an aesthetic TVY devising process, and recognize how necessary it is to incorporate the young people themselves into the design

and development of new work. I return here to the *Qualities of Quality* meta-analysis where one finding suggests that, "for many students, once engaged, the intrinsic pleasure of making or experiencing art becomes truly joyful. Students described such experience as 'serious fun'—both incredibly demanding and truly exhilarating" (30). If my goal is to truly prioritize the experience (particularly a joyful experience!) for young audience members, I recognize how necessary it is to incorporate their opinions and understand how they engage with a performance much earlier in the making process than what I designed for this study. Finally, I recognize that incorporating the influence of an educational framework in a TVY making process is only *one* part of an artistic making process. I understand better how to value the artistry that theatre makers bring into a rehearsal space—including my own artistry.

Through this research process, I found that blending the roles of "artist" and "educator" in a TVY space was less intuitive than I had anticipated. Blending the artistic work of rehearsal and devising with an educational framework was more complicated than I expected, and in practice I left behind a great deal of my original focus on *Reggio* philosophy for the art making process itself. I intuitively found myself relating to and with the young people at the preschool, but was surprised to find that I had a difficult time connecting to the educators at the Austin Preschool. Through this research, I have developed a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which young people, specifically children in a preschool setting and those who are accompanied by their adult caregivers, engage with a TVY performance. Through analyzing data from the three *Magic Box* performances, I observed both passive and active forms of engagement from the young

audience members. Two significant influences on the performances rose to the surface through my analysis. These influences on youth engagement include the performance space's physical environment and the influence of adult intervention. As a maker, I understand better how considering these influences throughout the development process are key ways to center the experiences and invitations for engagement for youth audience members. In this project, I focused so thoroughly on incorporating observations into the devising process. In a future reiteration of a similar TVY making process, I understand the value of more thoroughly considering how a TVY performance needs to attend to the environment and the adults in the space.

RESEARCH CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Like any devising process, time and resources are both limiting factors. This project took place over an intentionally short span of time, with intentionally short rehearsal periods. While I hoped to develop a collaborative ethos with my artistic ensemble and simultaneously build a strong new relationship with my preschool community partner, I fear that the short amount of time detracted from my ability to co-construct a cohesive theatre making process. This limited time also meant that I only developed the beginnings of a relationship with the preschool teachers at the Austin site. It was a struggle to find time to meet with my artistic team on the weekends, and finding shared time that we could perform or rehearse at the preschool never even entered the realm of possibilities for this project. I feel strongly that the final performance of *Magic Box* would have been a much different beast if we had rehearsed with preschool

audiences during test runs. The nature of an MFA thesis project invites me to experiment with a new performance making process, and my learning comes in the form of retrospective meaning making—this is to say, I am grateful for the opportunity to take risks, make mistakes, discover and name those mistakes, and imagine another iteration of performance making for very young audiences.

I was pleased with the amount of agency I was given by the Austin Preschool to bring a new project into their school. As I got closer to the performance deadline for *Magic Box,* however, I found that I hadn't developed a collaborative relationship with the education staff in the same way that I was with my artistic ensemble. I was comfortable with and excited by my emerging friendships with the young people at the preschool, but felt less clear about how I stood in relationship to the adults. I opened this research document with a desire to bridge the communication gap between those who consider themselves theatre makers and those who consider themselves educators. In my desire to occupy both spaces (the education sphere and the art-making lab space), I found myself defaulting to my "artist" role to devise a theatre work. The *Reggio* philosophy for education was an influencing factor in my project design: I wanted to observe preschool students who went to a school that used a constructivist model for learning, and I used a model of devising that used provocations to inspire performance material. However, as I conclude this research process, I do not think I can responsibly claim that a *Reggio* framework was centered in my making process. My desire to codify a novel theatre making structure that considered the tensions between art and education values did not always match my actions. I suspect that in great part I felt so much more confident and

successful in the performances of *Magic Box* that took place in a "traditional" theatre space at UT than I did in the outdoor preschool space because throughout my process I did not work as rigorously to advocate for the performance's "educational value" as I did its artistic value.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROJECT GROWTH

Although this project revealed challenges and limitations, I am excited by the potential for future iterations, particularly in thinking toward building a more intentional educational framework for the project design. In *The Hundred Languages of Children, Reggio Emilio* educators Cathleen Smith and Ivana Soncini propose this model for a long term *Reggio* learning project. I offer their words with reflection on my own process interspersed throughout their writing. Smith and Soncini write that a learning designer might "establish and maintain reciprocity as a central operating principle, with emphasis on developing a sense of 'we'" (234).

I suspect that the data I collected regarding young participant engagement at the preschool would have significantly differed if I had established a more intentional "we" in my relationship building with the Austin Preschool. I was motivated by my intention to perform *Magic Box* for the preschool audience who had given me so much observational content, and yet I did not consider how the preschool community might have contributed expertise in terms of facilitating projects with and for this community of learners. Smith and Soncini continue,

> [...] base the development of the project on the questions, comments, and interests of the children involved … provide ample time for children to come up with their own questions and their own solutions. (235)

While I am thrilled to have had so much opportunity to film the students in their play environment and to infer meaning from their play habits, in a future iteration of this project I will develop a more intentional process for collecting curiosities, questions and interests directly from the young people involved in a devising process. In returning to the *Reggio* framework for inspiration and structural underpinning I also acknowledge that there is a significant body of research and practice that considers the ways theatre practitioners work with young people as dramaturgs. Returning to her dissertation work on a "youth respondent method," I am emboldened to consider Leahey's call to action: "youth [in a youth respondent method] serve as active producers … throughout the play development process, playwrights create with the guidance of directors and dramaturgs. In creating for young audiences, another collaborator is joining the development discussion: the youth respondent" (6). In this same vein, I am inspired by TVY development practices taking place world-wide that consider young people as a key partner in responding to and inspiring components of new work. In my own practice, I wonder how a method for collecting this information can better be co-designed by myself as an artistic researcher with educators or adult caregivers. Finally, *Reggio Emilia* educators Smith and Soncini suggests that we "bring the knowledge and experience of the children back to other children in the school. Share the experience of the project with other adults" (235). Central to the *Reggio* process is the idea that sharing children's learning and ideas out in a public facing way is crucial for developing community

understanding and meaning-making. In another iteration of this project, I see the importance of incorporating feedback and participation from young dramaturgs throughout a devising process. Although I became more personally attuned to the interests of the preschool population at the Austin Preschool, I did not develop a means of sharing this learning with or asking for dramaturgical contributions of the teachers or the students at the Austin Preschool. Through the process of developing *Magic Box*, I relied heavily on the artistic input and creative impulses of my artistic ensemble. I have come to believe that there is a balance between using young people as a source of inspiration, and actively listening and responding to young people's aesthetic interests. I started this inquiry because of a tension I felt around artists and educators both claiming to better "center" youth in their work and practice. I hoped, with this research, to develop an artistic facilitator role that combined both artistic and educational expertise.

In *Theatre for Youth Third Space*, community-based theatre practitioner and scholar Stephani Etheridge Woodson outlines a philosophical framework for asset based collaboration between young people and adults which she calls Theatre for Youth (TFY) third space. While there is still much to examine and build upon in this research, both from studying an educational framework in a theatre making context, and in developing better practices for creating aesthetically driven performance work specifically for very young audiences in an educational setting, I am inspired by what Etheridge Woodson calls a TFY third space. "TFY," Etheridge Woodson writes, offers, "a powerful spot to occupy, an in-between that allows us to experiment with choices, consequences, and ways of being and interact 'where unlike things must meet and mate'" (13). It is my

intention to push myself as a TVY maker in a direction that moves beyond the binary trap of "arts versus education:" valuing either "art for art's sake" or "educational theatre." Instead, I intend to incorporate an educational framework that includes young people's modes of engagement much the same way that inquiry based pedagogical spaces value young people's active and participatory learning. In practice, this looks like more intentional relationship building with key stakeholders: the artists, the educators, and the youth dramaturgs. When I revisit *Magic Box* again, I will perform for more groups of preschoolers and their teachers during the making process. If I were to develop a new play using a similar devising framework, I would develop a more intentional process to, from the beginning, capture the interests and queries of the young people in their learning environment and lean into the facilitation expertise of a partnering preschool education team. Leaning into this third space makes me excited to continue investigating how I might tether my artist practice for engaging young audiences to a *Reggio* inspired model of creating experiences specifically for young people.

LOOKING BACK TO THINK FORWARD

Prior to starting this research project, I understood the tension between arts and education to be a binary space, with stakeholders on one side or the other. However, I have come to understand more deeply that, at the heart of a TVY third space, is the three-part relationship amongst the theatre artists, the constructivist educators, *and* the youth participants. This triangle of balance offers a more nuanced relationship of dynamics and expertise that I believe would lead TVY practitioners to center youth engagement with

quality, engaging performances. I have danced with the notion of "quality" performance and engagement for and with very young people. In *Qualities of Quality,* the 2009 meta-analysis of what constitutes quality in arts education practices, the authors posit, "the drive for quality is personal, passionate and persistent" (Seidel et al. iii). This inquiry into experimenting with making theatre for very young people that considers the frameworks and values of a constructivist educational space has been a deeply personal pursuit for me, and a space to discover my own gaps and areas for growth. Quality engagement, as I understand it, exists in spaces that deeply honor and attend to the values, tastes, and interests of the audience for whom the art was made.

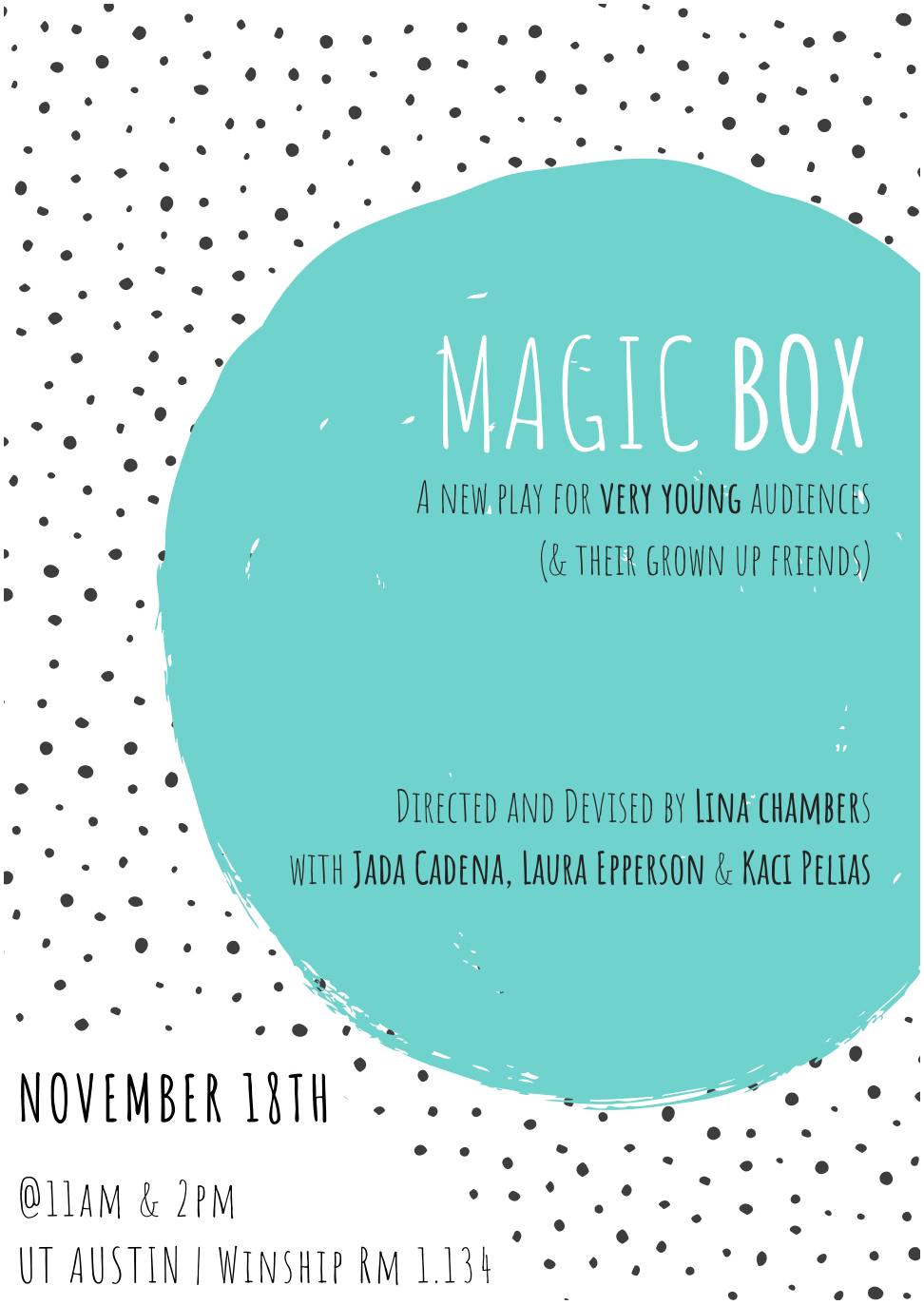
As I grow as an artist educator, I intend to make explicit spaces for young people to enter the artmaking process. I challenge myself to invite the adult caregivers and educators to make space for active, rebellious participation within a theatrical experience by clearly framing the experience for the adults throughout the making and performing process. I challenge myself not shy away from the intensity of a "chaotic" young person's interaction with a TVY performance by creating scaffolded invitations for youth participation and active engagement. I wonder too where too can my artistry and skills as a facilitator can make space for age-specific performance that caters to the young people's interests, interests, and whole selves.

I continue to commit to bridging the tension between myself as an artist and myself as an educator by investing in a TVY third space. As I so deeply came to understand throughout this thesis process, the meeting of these two spaces is more nuanced, complicated, and tangled within itself than I originally understood it to be. It's

time, as *artists* to invest in our own expertise and expand our artistry to include our facilitator selves. It's time, as *educators* to honor the artistry of our work. It's time, as *advocates and professional responders to our youngest learners* for us to make space for youth voices in the building and devising processes of art experiences intended specifically for them. As I hope to move into the next iteration of a TVY making process, I hope to honor and attend to a narrative structure in my work that reflects (and draws inspiration from) the specificity of youth engaged in free play. I urge my artist-self and my educator-self to continue to blend in an effort to understand how young people engage with performance art, regardless of its "academic" value. Education and artistry might indeed 'meet and mate' in this TVY third space.

Appendices

Appendix A: Production Poster



Appendix B: Performance Treatment of *Magic Box*

MAGIC BOX

Director & Devisor: **Lina Chambers**
Devisors & Performers: **Laura Epperson, Kaci Pelias**
Sound Designer, Foley Artist, Devisor: **Jada Cadena**
Costume Designer: **Laura Gonzalez**
Lighting Designer: **Bill Rios**

Created in partnership with The PaperBoats international co-creation project

PRE SHOW / INTRODUCTION

Laura (LE) and Kaci (KP) enter BLUE SQUARE. Stand side by side on USR corner.

LE pulls paper roll from out of pocket. Show's the audience, shows KP.

LE pushes roll as far as it will go from SR to SL. LE starts to take a step onto the paper (big exhale!) LE puts foot down, turns around and indicates to KP with her eyes that something is missing.

KP runs USC to grab boxes and hold them, following behind exactly as LE moves from SR to SL.

Push the roll, walk, stop, look behind, look forward, repeat - until the roll is all the way to the farthest SR corner.

LE rips off roll and puts it in her pocket

KP must put boxes down next to where LE is. Tightrope balance reverse.

KP set boxes down

LE adjust the boxes so they are stacked neatly.

KP is ready for the next task!

LE opens top box and pulls out two stacks of small square pieces of paper. Half to KP, half to LE

KP and LE switch places on the tightrope once again. KP is now on SL corner, LE walks back to SR corner.
KP & LE place paper squares down in front of each child sitting around the perimeter of the stage. Step onto square, place wooden ball in center of the square.

KP and LE move DS and then meet DSC - “oh no! Now we’re stranded and we don’t know how to get back US!”

LE takes out roll from pocket, rolls it USC

KP tries to get on the roll, LE blocks her and marches up - when she gets US, she realizes the line is not straight!

LE and KP pick up the paper line and shift it to perfectly Center Stage.

KP pulls too tight and breaks the line

- slowly, guiltily, pulls it to herself (oops).

LE rolls the roll back to KP. KP rips roll off end, KP comes to meet LE USC while holding on to the ripped piece of paper.

KP hands LE roll. Stand in place for a beat (KP with broken paper, LE with roll)

LE and KP switch positions - LE moves SL to small box and begins to pull out smaller boxes and stack them up perfectly

KP moves SR and watches LE. Then KP Gets an Idea! She remembers she knows where a REALLY BIG box is.

KP exits.

LE takes out the contents of the smaller box and places them in front of her. Box, box, box, umbrella, umbrella.

KP enters with GIANT BOX and walks it SL, then DSC.

LE watches hesitantly,

KP gets the “go-ahead” from LE

KP walks the box to CS and DUMPS it out revealing the giant nest.

KP walks back upstage, leaves the GIANT (empty) BOX USC, KP grabs costume pieces.

LE walks, holding the small stacked boxes and umbrellas DSC to the nest. Moment of wonder with the nest.

LE places the three boxes in the designated spaces of the nest.

LE pulls two wooden spheres out of her pocket [and two pieces of origami paper?]

Indicate to the audience to pick up their ball, wrap it in the paper, and hold it in their hands in their lap for later.

LE makes two small “holes” in the nest to “plant” the wrapped balls

KP walks behind LE to watch. KP hands LE her costume piece

LE hands KP an umbrella.

Big inhale from both, and they jump (holding the umbrellas!) into the BLUE space.

KP and LE acknowledge each other, acknowledge the audience then get into the nest with
backs facing each other. Both put on their costume pieces and transform into Beetle and Snail.
Crouch down, plant umbrellas, cover up with paper.

MODULE 1 - Nest games

KP wake up

Moment of wonder and moving the paper off of her as much as she can

Stretch US, DS, SL, then reach SR but notice LE/something strange and hide back in the nest.

LE slowly stretch herself awake. Blinking eyes, glorious paper. Acknowledge the audience - look at the paper and smooth it in to herself DS, US, SR and then reaching behind, feel KP

KP pop up.

This is the first time KP and LE are seeing one another.
Mirror game (LE leads).

LE uses the mirror game to get KP to smooth out the paper with her.

Reach in the nest, grab a roll, pull up some paper, stretch it in front, crinkle crinkle, smile.

Repeat 2 or 3 times.

On the 3rd or 4th repetition of the “smooth” game, KP reaches into the nest and instead of pulling up paper roll pulls out BLUE FINGER LIGHT. Moment of surprise.

LE stop what you're doing, try to get the BLUE LIGHT from KP.

KP leads game of toss with the light.

After 4th or 5th toss, the light gets dropped and LE tries to “fish” it out (“it’s a big one!”) but instead pulls up KP’S UMBRELLA

Moment of surprise, LE tries to use it, finds it not useful and buries it in front of KP.

LE takes a breath and then invites KP to join again on the paper flattening pattern.

KP follows along but is not interested in the paper pattern- she wants to get her umbrella. On the 3rd repetition, KP pulls out the umbrella.

LE gives KP a shitty look, and KP buries the umbrella again.

LE reaches in for more paper, but discovers a box full of PING PONG BALLS. This is SUCH a treat and LE is very excited. She pulls out one of the balls and holds it lovingly.

KP grabs the box from LE, raises it above her head and dumps the whole thing out so that all the round spheres go everywhere.

Moment of surprise. Moment of big loss for LE.

LE holds the ball she has and turns her back on KP

KP tries to re-establish the paper smoothing game, LE won’t play

KP gives up and reaches in (finally!) for the umbrella. The umbrella begins to vibrate. It wants to be opened.

KP opens the umbrella, and LE shoves her. A back and forth of shoving between the characters, until finally KP is both pushed (by LE) and pulled (by the umbrella) OUT of the nest.

LE acknowledges that this is a big deal, then turns around.

KP tentatively steps farther outside of the nest, holding the umbrella.

KP umbrella solo dance of freedom.

KP's dance turns into realizing that there are balls everywhere and she tries to pick them up to put in her pockets

LE goes back to paper smoothing pattern. She gets bored that KP isn't there and digs into the nest and finds BALLOON BOX.

As KP is gathering balls and playing with the umbrella, KP goes to sit with an audience member on the SR or SL DS corner.

LE has the stage now and opens up the balloon box. She blows up a balloon, which is amazing.

LE tosses the balloon, as if to play by herself, and the balloon deflates and flies away. KP goes and grabs the deflated balloon and puts in her pocket.

LE blows two balloons at once, she tries to toss them to KP, again, the go everywhere except where she meant them to go.

KP picks up deflated balloons.

LE tries one more time, fails, then chucks an empty (non-blown in) balloon to KP

KP blows up the balloon TIES IT, and tosses it.

A game of toss (*oop*! sounds abounding)
LE remembers she's frustrated and pops/sits on/hides/deflates the balloon

MODULE 3 - A New Beginning

KP starts to be moved by the umbrella, the umbrella is trying to tell her something.

LE is very worried about her nest and her tiny wooden egg.

LE reaches in for another box and pulls out a miniature umbrella.

KP is frustrated with LE and is moving around the stage. The Umbrella is still trying to get her to notice something.

KP Stops and remembers that there are many ping pong balls - they're in her pocket!

She collects them all and brings them to LE's nest as a gift and to protect them.

LE puts each of the balls into the nest. The wind stops.

LE makes the choice to put the protected eggs in the center of the nest.

KP finds her blue light and drops it into LE's nest.

LE reaches into the nest in search of the light KP dropped in and finds HER UMBRELLA

KP coaches LE/ mirrors for her how to use the umbrella

Tentatively, LE gets out of the nest.

A racing game.

A double umbrella dance outside the nest

LE looks at the eggs in the nest, and then notices that each of the audience members still have their wrapped eggs.

LE and KP begin to invite each of the kiddos to come up to the nest to drop in their wrapped ball

When everyone (who wants to :) has put their wrapped ball into the nest, LE and KP stand USC of the nest. They put their umbrellas up, they look at each other, they look at the audience.

They put the umbrellas down.

[end of play]

OUTRO
KP and LE stop the WILD applause

They grab the two boxes - the big and the small - and put their umbrellas into them.

They take their costume piece off and put it in the small box.

Then they invite the audience to look at materials.

A survey is distributed.

Appendix C: Adult Caregiver & Child Post-Show Interview Questions

Adult Caregiver & Child Post-Show Interview

Please take a few minutes to ask your young person the following questions. You may write down their responses verbatim, or give a summary of how they responded in your own words.

Interview questions from Adult to Child:

1. What happened in the play that we just watched?

2. Who were the characters in the play? How did they make you feel?

3. Which character was like you? What did they do that was like you?

Questions for Adult Caregivers:

1. How engaged was your student with today's performance? Please select an option below:

    ○ Extremely engaged; their attention was held throughout
    ○ Mostly engaged; they focused on most of the performance
    ○ Somewhat engaged; only parts of the performance interested them
    ○ Not engaged; very little or none of the performance was of interest to them

2. Were there any moments in the story that seemed to engage your young person? How did they express their engagement?

3. Did you see anything in the characters that reminded you of your young person? If so, please describe the moment (or moments) and what about it reminded you of your student.

4. What else would you like us to know about your child's experience of *Magic Box?*

Appendix D: Performance Observation (for Individual Students)

IRB USE ONLY
Study Number: 2018-08-0081

Performance Observation (for Individual Students)

Please observe one student for the duration of the performance and mark their specific reactions to Magic Box.

Performance Date:

Performance Time:

Observations

Please rate the accuracy of the following statements below by circling an appropriate number, and provide any additional feedback as necessary.

First 10 minutes of the performance (before the performers get inside of the paper nest)

My student is engaged in the performance.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at All true		Somewhat		Absolutely

Describe what you notice about their participation/ how they are or are not engaging with the performers and the performance:

Second 10 minutes of the performance (when the performers are inside of the nest)

My student is engaged in the performance.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at All true		Somewhat		Absolutely

Describe what you notice about their participation/ how they are or are not engaging with the performers and the performance:

Third 10 minutes of the performance (when one performer is inside of the nest, and the other performer is outside of the nest)

My student is engaged in the performance.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at All true		Somewhat		Absolutely

Describe what you notice about their participation/ how they are or are not engaging with the performers and the performance:

Final 10 minutes of the performance (when both performers are outside of the nest).

My student is engaged in the performance.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at All true		Somewhat		Absolutely

Describe what you notice about their participation/ how they are or are not engaging with the performers and the performance:

Post-Show Reflection Questions

Did your student seem to resonate with a particular performer/character? If so, can you describe physically how they were showing interest?

Did your student seem to resonate with a particular moment in the performance? If so, can you describe physically how they were showing interest?

Is there anything else you think I should know?

Appendix E: IRB Letter of Approval

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SUPPORT & COMPLIANCE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

P.O. Box 7426, Austin, Texas 78713 · Mail Code A3200
(512) 471-8871 · FAX (512) 471-8873

FWA # 00002030

Date: 10/17/2018
PI: Carolina L Chambers
Dept: Theatre and Dance
Title: A Method for the Magic: Devising and Developing Engaged Theatre for the Very Young

Re: IRB Expedited Approval for Protocol Number 2018-08-0081

Dear Carolina L Chambers,

In accordance with the Federal Regulations the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the above referenced research study and found it met the requirements for approval under the Expedited category noted below for the following period of time: 10/17/2018 to 10/16/2019. Expires 12 a.m. [midnight] of this date. If the research will be conducted at more than one site, you may initiate research at any site from which you have a letter granting you permission to conduct the research. You should retain a copy of the letter in your files.

☐ 1) Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met. (a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review). (b) Research on medical devices for which (i) an investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or (ii) the medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.

☐ 2) Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows: (a) from healthy, non-pregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or (b) from other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8 week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.

☐ 3) Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means.
Examples:
(a) Hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner.
(b) Deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction;
(c) Permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates a need for extraction.
(d) Excreta and external secretions (including sweat).
(e) Uncannulated saliva collected either in an un-stimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gumbase or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue.
(f) Placenta removed at delivery.
(g) Amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor.
(h) Supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine prophylactic scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques.
(i) Mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings.
(j) Sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.

☐ 4) Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications).
Examples:
(a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy.
(b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity.
(c) Magnetic resonance imaging.
(d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography.
(e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.

☐ 5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.

☑ 6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

☑ 7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.
Note: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.

☑ Use the attached approved informed consent document(s).

☑ You have been granted a Waiver of Documentation of Consent according to 45 CFR 46.117 and/or 21 CFR 56.109(c)(1).

☐ You have been granted a Waiver of Informed Consent according to 45 CFR 46.116(d).

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1. Report immediately to the IRB any unanticipated problems.

2. Submit for review and approval by the IRB all modifications to the protocol or consent form(s). Ensure the proposed changes in the approved research are not applied without prior IRB review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. Changes in approved research implemented without IRB review and approval initiated to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject must be promptly reported to the IRB, and will be reviewed under the unanticipated problems policy to determine whether the change was consistent with ensuring the subjects continued welfare.

3. Report any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to continue to participate.

4. Ensure that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.

5. Use only a currently approved consent form, if applicable. Note: Approval periods are for 12 months or less.

6. Protect the confidentiality of all persons and personally identifiable data, and train your staff and collaborators on policies and procedures for ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and their information.

7. Submit a Continuing Review Application for continuing review by the IRB. Federal regulations require IRB review of on-going projects no less than once a year a reminder letter will be sent to you two months before your expiration date. If a reminder is not received from Office of Research Support and Compliance (RSC) about your upcoming continuing review, it is still the primary responsibility of the Principal Investigator not to conduct research activities on or after the expiration date. The Continuing Review Application must be submitted, reviewed and approved, before the expiration date.

8. Upon completion of the research study, a Closure Report must be submitted to the RSC.

9. Include the IRB study number on all future correspondence relating to this protocol.

If you have any questions contact the RSC by phone at (512) 471-8871 or via e-mail at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

Sincerely,

James P. Wilson

James Wilson, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair

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